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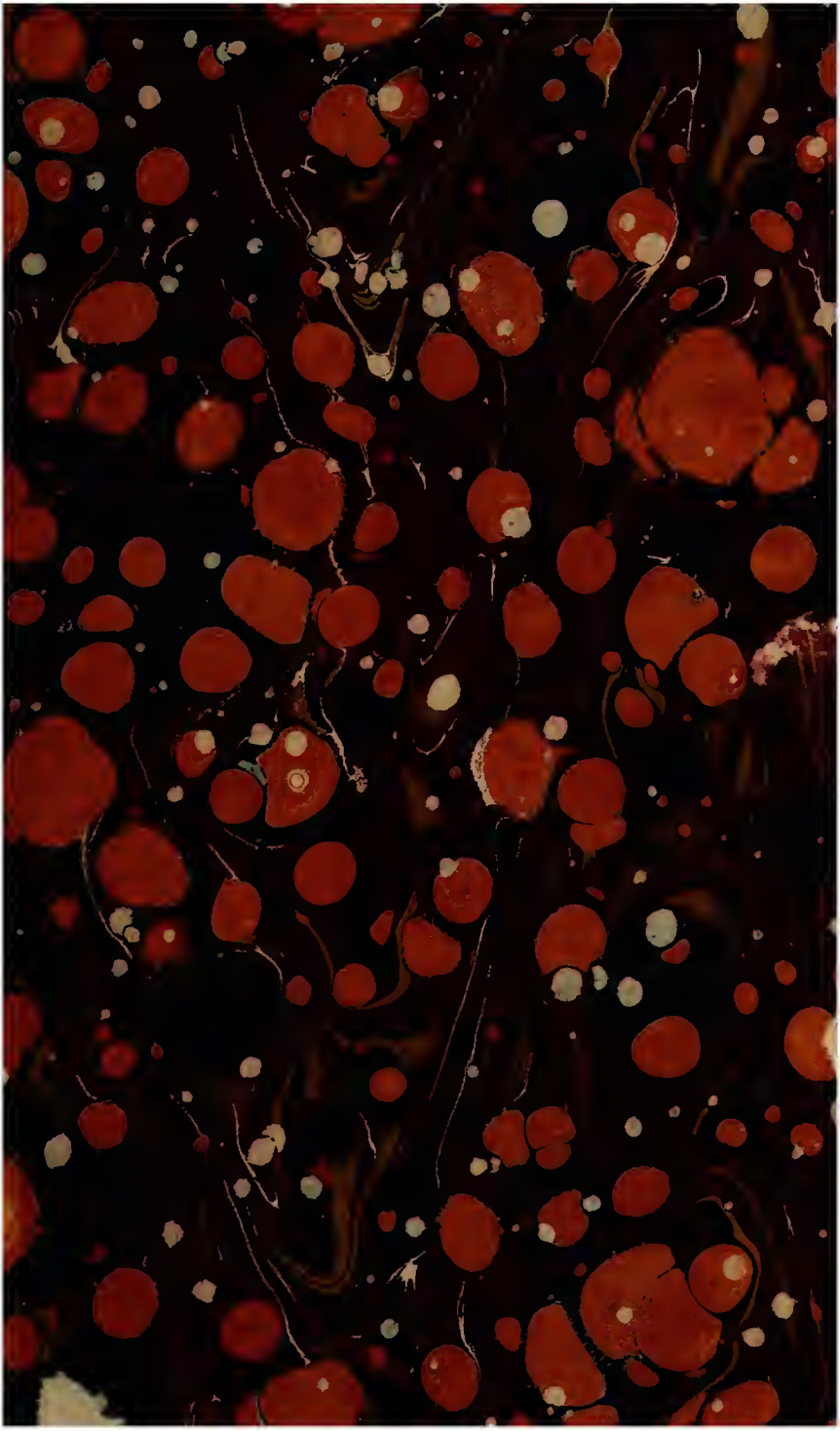

SAINT JAMES'S:

OR

THE COURT OF QUEEN ANNE.

An Historical Romance.

BY

WILLIAM HARRISON AINSWORTH, ESQ.

AUTHOR OF "THE TOWER OF LONDON,"
"WINDSOR CASTLE," ETC.

WITH

ILLUSTRATIONS BY GEORGE CRUIKSHANK.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
JOHN MORTIMER, ADELAIDE STREET,
TRAFALGAR SQUARE.
1844.

TO

G. P. R. JAMES, ESQ.

MY DEAR JAMES,

IT gives me sincere pleasure to inscribe this book with your name. Not that I think it worth your acceptance, but that the Dedication will afford me an opportunity of expressing the great regard which, in common with the rest of your private friends, I entertain for you, as well as the admiration with which, in common with the whole reading world, I regard your many and varied performances.

The idlest of the race of authors myself, as you are the most industrious, I used to be filled with wonder at your extraordinary fertility of production; but when I became more intimately acquainted with your energetic character, and unwearied application, and understood better the inexhaustible stores of fancy, experience, and reading you have to draw upon, my surprise gave way to admiration.

Your brother writers owe you a large debt of gratitude, though I fear it has been but imperfectly paid. It is mainly, if not entirely, to your influence and exertions, that Continental Piracy has received a check, and that unauthorized foreign reprints of English works have been kept out of the market. May opportunity be given you to do yet more for us!

One word as to my story. I know

not whether my portraiture of Marlborough will please you. Very likely not. If I have painted him too much *en beau*, it is because almost every other writer has shaded his character too deeply; underrating his brilliant services, and dwelling upon his few failings, rather than upon his many and exalted qualities. While reading some of these ungenerous memoirs, I could not help echoing the indignant exclamation of Frederick the Great — "What! could not Blenheim, Ramilies, Oudenarde, nor Malplaquet, defend the name of that great man, nor even Victory itself shield him against envy and detraction?" Happy are you in the friendship of a Hero who has extended the glory of British Arms even further than Marlborough extended it; whose victories have thrown Blenheim and Ramilies into the shade; and

whose laurels have never been tarnished, like those of the Great Commander of Queen Anne's days.

The amusement and instruction they have derived from your writings have endeared you to hosts of readers; but if they were as well aware of your excellent qualities of heart as they are of those of your head; if they knew the enlarged views you take of human nature; the rare liberality you exhibit towards your contemporaries; and the kindly sympathies you entertain for all, they would estimate you as highly as

Your sincere friend,

W. Harrison Ainsworth.

Kensal Manor-house,
October 26, 1844.

CONTENTS OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

Book the First.

Chapter — Page

I. A GLANCE AT THE COURT AND CABINET OF QUEEN ANNE IN 1707 3

II. THE FRENCH ADVENTURER, AND THE QUEEN'S FAVOURITE 26

III. A TETE-A-TETE AT MARLBOROUGH HOUSE . . 63

IV. THE BALL AT THE PALACE, AND WHAT HAPPENED AT IT 87

V. A PEEP BELOW STAIRS AT MARLBOROUGH HOUSE 120

VI. INTRODUCES SERJEANT SCALES, AND SHEWS HOW THE DUKE OF MARLBOROUGH'S BOOTS WERE CLEANED 137

VII. OF THE MORTAL DEFIANCE OFFERED TO SERJEANT SCALES BY MONSIEUR HIPPOLYTE BIMBELOT 172

VIII. THE SECRETARY'S LEVEE 185

Chapter Page

IX. IN WHICH IT IS SHEWN THAT THE DUCHESS OF MARLBOROUGH HAD NOT ENTIRELY LOST HER INFLUENCE OVER THE QUEEN 209

X. OF THE PROVOCATION OFFERED BY MASHAM TO THE MARQUIS DE GUISCARD AT THE SAINT JAMES'S COFFEE-HOUSE; AND OF THE CHALLENGE THAT ENSUED 235

XI. OF THE ASSEMBLAGE OF WITS MET BY MASHAM AT SUPPER AT MR. SAINT-JOHN'S, AND OF THE MEANS PROPOSED BY HIM OF ADJUSTING A QUARREL BETWEEN MRS. BRACEGIRDLE AND MRS. OLDFIELD 249

XII. THE PARTY IS INCREASED BY THE UNEXPECTED ARRIVAL OF MRS. HYDE AND HER DAUGHTER— THE CAUSE OF THEIR VISIT EXPLAINED . . . 282

SAINT JAMES'S:

OR,

THE COURT OF QUEEN ANNE.

Book the First.

THE DUCHESS OF MARLBOROUGH.

CHAPTER I.

A GLANCE AT THE COURT AND CABINET OF QUEEN ANNE IN 1707.

THE commencement of the year Seventeen Hundred and Seven saw Queen Anne, to all outward appearance, in the most enviable position of any sovereign in Europe. Secure of the affections of her subjects, to whom the wisdom and beneficence of her five years' sway had endeared her, and who had begun to bestow upon her the affectionate appellation of the "good Queen;" dreaded by her enemies, who had everywhere felt and acknowledged the prowess of

her arms; cheered by the constant cry of victory; surrounded by able and devoted counsellors; served by one of the greatest commanders that England had then ever known; encircled by a brilliant court, distinguished alike for its grace, its polish, and its wit; fortunate in flourishing at an age when every branch of literature and science was cultivated with the most eminent success; thus fortunately circumstanced, with all around prosperous and promising, the Union with Scotland recently effected, the pride of France humbled, the balance of power in Europe established, and the Protestant succession firmly secured, nothing appeared wanting to Anne's grandeur and happiness.

And yet under this mask of glory she concealed an anxious heart. The power seemed valueless, which rarely, if ever,

availed to carry into effect a favourite measure. The constitutional indolence of her royal consort, Prince George of Denmark, to whom she was tenderly attached, and his incompetency to the due fulfilment of the high offices he had been appointed to, and which not unfrequently drew upon him the sarcastic censure of the party in opposition, were sources of grievance. The loss of all her family, and especially of the Duke of Gloucester, at the age of eleven, preyed upon her spirits, and in seasons of depression, to which she was subject, made her regard the bereavement as a judgment for her desertion of her father, the deposed and exiled James the Second. The situation of her brother, the Chevalier de Saint George, as he styled himself, also troubled her, and sometimes awakened scruples within her breast as to whether she was not usurping

a throne which, of right, belonged to him. Added to this, her cabinet was secretly disunited, while party warfare raged with so much violence that she herself was but little respected in its attacks and reprisals.

Not the least of her annoyances was the state of thraldom in which she was kept by the Duchess of Marlborough. Her friendship for this illustrious lady was of early date, and had been confirmed by the zeal and warmth displayed by the latter during the differences between Anne, while Princess of Denmark, and her sister, Queen Mary. So strong did the princess's attachment to her favourite become, and so anxious was she to lay aside form and ceremony with her, and put her on an equality with herself, that in her correspondence and private intercourse she chose to assume the name of Mrs. Morley, while Lady Marl-

borough was permitted to adopt that of Mrs. Freeman.

Of an imperious and ambitious nature, endowed with high mental qualifications, and a sound and clear judgment when not distorted or obscured by passion, the Duchess of Marlborough, as she became immediately after Anne's elevation to the throne on the 8th March, 1702, determined to leave no means untried to aggrandize and enrich her husband and her family. Her views were seconded by her royal mistress, from whom she obtained, besides large pensions, the places of groom of the stole, mistress of the robes, and keeper of the great and home parks and of the privy purse, while she extended her family influence by uniting her eldest daughter, the Lady Henrietta Churchill, to Lord Ryalton, eldest son of the Earl of Godolphin, lord high treasurer;

her second daughter, Lady Anne, to the Earl of Sunderland; her third, Lady Elizabeth, to the Earl of Bridgewater; and her fourth and youngest, Lady Mary, to the Marquis of Monthermer, afterwards by her interest created Duke of Montague. Hence the Marlborough and Godolphin party were called, by their opponents, "THE FAMILY."

Anne's great bounty to the duchess and constant concession to her opinions, made the latter suppose she had only to ask and have; only to bear down in argument to convince, or at least gain her point. And for awhile she was successful. The queen's good nature yielded to her demands, while her timidity shrank before her threats. But these submissions were purchased by the duchess at the price of her royal mistress's regard; and more than one quarrel having occurred between them, it became

evident to all, except the favourite herself, that her sway was on the decline. Blinded, however, by confidence in the mastery she had obtained over the queen, she conceived her position to be as firm as that of the sovereign herself, and defied her enemies to displace her.

A coalition having occurred two years before between Marlborough and Godolphin, and the Whigs, the ministry was now almost wholly supported by that party, into whose confidence, notwithstanding her former disagreement with them, the queen had surrendered herself on the meeting of the second parliament, in 1705, in consequence of the affront she had received from the Tories, when the motion whether the Princess Sophia should be invited to England, was made; upon which occasion she wrote to the Duchess of Marlborough—" I

believe we shall not disagree, as we have formerly done; for I am sensible of the services those people (the Whigs) have done me that you have a good opinion of, and will countenance them, and am thoroughly convinced of the malice and insolence of them (the Tories) that you have always been speaking against."

The leaders of the Whig cabinet, distinguished by the title of "The Junta," were the Lords Somers, Halifax, Wharton, Orford, and Sunderland,—all five statesmen of great and varied abilities and approved zeal in behalf of the protestant succession, while Halifax's zealous patronage and promotion of men of letters and science, as exhibited towards Addison, Prior, Locke, Steele, Congreve, and Newton, is too well known to need recapitulation here.

To most of the Junta, however, the queen

entertained a strong dislike, and notwithstanding the repeated requests of the Duchess of Marlborough for the appointment of her son-in-law, the Earl of Sunderland, to the office of secretary of state, it was only on the personal solicitation of the duke himself, on his return from his last glorious campaign, that the earl received the place on the dismissal of Sir Charles Hedges. The Tory opposition was headed by the Lords Rochester, Jersey, Nottingham, Haversham, Sir Edward Seymour, Sir Nathan Wright, and the above-mentioned Sir Charles Hedges.

The Earl of Godolphin, whose interests, as well from family connexion as from community of sentiment, were co-existent with those of the Duke of Marlborough, was a person, if not of dazzling talent, of such industry and capacity for business as more

than compensated for any want of brilliancy, and admirably adapted him to his office of high-treasurer. Methodical in management, and exact in payment, he raised the credit of the country to a higher point than it had ever before attained, and was consequently enabled to procure supplies whenever they were required. A man of the strictest honour, he never failed in his engagements; and though forbidding in manner and difficult of access, was generally esteemed.

There were two other members of the cabinet who were closely united in friendship, and of whom the highest expectations were formed. These were Mr. Saint-John and Mr. Harley. Both were Tories, and belonged to the high church party, having taken office in 1704, when Harley consented to succeed the Earl of Nottingham,

as secretary of state, on condition that his friend Saint-John should be made secretary at war. This was readily acceded to; for Saint-John's wit and eloquence, combined with his brilliant abilities and graceful manners, had long recommended him to notice, and must have ensured him promotion earlier if his unbridled profligacy had not stood in his way. Since his appointment, however, he had applied to business with as much ardour as he had heretofore devoted himself to pleasure, and so wonderful were the powers he displayed, so clear and comprehensive was his judgment, so inexhaustible were his resources, that the highest post in the administration seemed within his reach. Among wits and men of letters, he ruled supreme, and was an arbiter of taste and fashion, as well as a political leader.

A very different man was Robert Harley.

Without the meteoric splendour, the fervid eloquence, the classical learning, the searching philosophy of Saint-John; but he had, nevertheless, a quick and keen understanding, great subtlety, and ever-stirring, though deep-seated ambition. Though enjoying a high reputation with all parties for skill in financial matters, for lucid, if not profound judgment, and for excellent habits of business; he was held to be somewhat uncertain, and was in reality a trimmer. To his indefatigable exertions was mainly owing the accomplishment of the Union with Scotland, the advantages of which measure have been subsequently felt to be so important.

Harley affected great moderation in his views, by which means he succeeded in veiling his fickleness; and it was a favourite maxim with him, that "the name of party ought to be abolished." Professing great

independency and liberality, however, he merely held himself aloof with the view of securing a certain influence with both parties. His agreeable and polished manners, tried abilities, and experience, had caused him to be chosen Speaker of the House of Commons during the two last parliaments of William the Third, and he was continued in the office on the accession of Anne, until his appointment as secretary of state, in 1704.

From many causes, Harley had rendered himself obnoxious to Godolphin; amongst others, it was supposed that he had supplanted the lord-treasurer in the favour of a certain Mrs. Oglethorpe, through whom important secrets, relative to the clandestine intrigues of the court of Saint-Germains, had been obtained. By the Duchess of Marlborough he was always treated with

contempt, and such was the haughtiness and distance with which she comported herself towards him, that it was surmised he must have dared to breathe dishonourable proposals to her; and as it was known that he would allow few scruples to stand in the way of his advancement, the path of which would have been cleared if he could have obtained the favour of the omnipotent duchess, the story obtained some credit. From whatever cause, however, whether from baffled hopes or wounded vanity, he conceived a strong antipathy to the duchess, and determined to destroy her influence with the queen, and at the same time overthrow her husband and Godolphin, and replace the Whig cabinet with a Tory ministry, of which he himself should be the head.

With these bold resolutions, and while

revolving the means of secretly reaching the ears of royalty, which was essential to the accomplishment of his project, but which appeared almost impossible, owing to the vigilance and caution of the duchess, an instrument was unexpectedly offered him.

One day, while waiting upon the queen at Saint James's, in his official capacity, he perceived among her attendants his cousin, Abigail Hill, the eldest daughter of a bankrupt Turkey merchant, who stood related to the Duchess of Marlborough in the same degree as to himself, and had very recently been preferred to her present situation by her grace's interest. Though Harley had hitherto, in consequence of the misfortunes of her family, wholly neglected her, he now instantly saw the use she might be to him; and congratulating her upon her appoint-

ment, professed the utmost desire to serve her.

New to a court, and unsuspicious of his designs, Abigail believed him, and forgave his previous coolness. The artful secretary took every means of ingratiating himself with her, and contrived to sow the seeds of enmity between her and the duchess. At the same time, he pointed out the course she ought to pursue to win the queen's favour; and his advice, which was most judiciously given, and with a full knowledge of Anne's foibles, being carefully followed, the anticipated consequences occurred. Abigail Hill speedily became her royal mistress's favourite and confidante.

Many accidental circumstances contributed to assist Abigail's progress in favour. Exasperated against the duchess, who had left her, upon some trifling misunderstand-

ing between them, with bitter reproaches, the queen burst into tears before her new attendant, who exerted herself so assiduously and so successfully to soothe her, that from that moment her subsequent hold upon the royal regard may be dated.

Apprehensive of the jealousy and anger of her old favourite, Anne was careful to conceal her growing partiality for the new one, and thus the duchess was kept in ignorance of the mischief that had occurred until too late to remedy it; while Abigail, on her part, though she had already become the receptacle of the queen's innermost thoughts, and thoroughly understood the importance of the position she had acquired, had the good sense to restrain any outward exhibition of her influence, knowing that the slightest indiscretion might be prejudicial to her rising fortunes.

Through the channel he had thus opened, Harley now ventured to propose to the queen his willingness to liberate her from the bondage of the duchess, if she was willing to commit the task to him; but Anne hesitated. She dreaded the shock which the separation would necessarily occasion; and about this time, the glorious battle of Ramilies being won, an important change was wrought by it in the duchess's favour.

Incomparably the most distinguished ornament of Anne's court, or of any court in Europe, whether as a commander or a statesman, though chiefly, of course, in the former capacity, was the Duke of Marlborough. His great military genius, approved in four glorious campaigns, and signalized by the victories of Schellenberg, Blenheim, and Ramilies, had raised him to a pinnacle of fame unattained by any living

commander, and had won for him, in addition to more substantial honours at home, the congratulations of most of the potentates of Europe. The dignity of prince had been conferred upon him by the Emperor Joseph, and he had been repeatedly thanked for his services by both houses of parliament.

No general had ever advanced the military glory of England to such an extent as Marlborough, and his popularity was unbounded. His achievements were the theme of every tongue, his praises were upon every lip; and however he might be secretly opposed, in public he was universally applauded. And well did he merit the highest praise bestowed upon him; well did he merit the highest reward he obtained. His were all the noblest qualities of a general; and his courage and skill were not greater than his

magnanimity and lenity. Perfect master of strategics, in enterprise and action he was alike unequalled. In the heat of battle he was calm and composed as in the tent; and a slight advantage gained was by him rapidly improved into a victory, while the victory itself was carried out to its full extent, not in needless slaughter, for no man shewed greater consideration and mercy than he did, but in preventing the enemy from rallying. England might well be proud of Marlborough, for he was among the greatest of her sons.

Nor were his abilities confined merely to the camp. He shone with almost equal splendour as a diplomatist, and his acute perception of character, his sagacity and extensive political knowledge, combined with his fascination of address and manner, admirably qualified him for negotiation with

foreign courts. Marlborough's absence with the army in Flanders prevented him from taking an active part, except by correspondence, in affairs at home, but he was ably represented by his wife and Godolphin.

The Duke returned to London towards the end of November, 1706, after completing his fourth campaign in the Low Countries, distinguished, among other important achievements, by the victory of Ramilies, above mentioned, which was followed by the submission of the chief cities of Flanders and Brabant, and the acknowledgment of Charles the Third as king.

Immediately on his arrival, Marlborough proceeded in a chair to St. James's, but in spite of his attempt at privacy he was discovered, and in an incredibly short space of time surrounded by eager thousands, who rent the air with their acclamations. Nor

was his reception by the sovereign and her illustrious consort less flattering. Prince George embraced him; and the queen, after thanking him, with much emotion, said, she should never feel easy till she had proved her gratitude for his unparalleled services.

Magnificent entertainments were subsequently given him by the lord mayor and the heads of the city, and as the colours and standards won at Blenheim were placed within Westminster Hall, so the trophies obtained at Ramilies were now borne by a large cavalcade of horse and foot, amid the roar of artillery and the shouts of myriads of spectators, to Guildhall, and there deposited. The duke's popularity was at its zenith. To oppose him would have been as dangerous as to attempt the dethronement of the queen herself. The voice of faction was drowned amid the thunder of general

applause; and for the moment, the efforts of his enemies were paralysed.

Such was the state of affairs at the beginning of the year 1707;—such Anne's position. Externally, all seemed smiling and prosperous, and the queen the happiest, as she was the best, if not the greatest sovereign in Europe. That she suffered from private grief has been shewn, as well as that she felt annoyance at the state of bondage in which she was kept; and it has also been shewn, that she was no stranger to the cabals and dissensions in her cabinet. To one bosom alone did she confide her secret sorrows,—to one ear alone breathe her wishes or designs. And the person so favoured, it is almost needless to repeat, was Abigail Hill.

CHAPTER II.

THE FRENCH ADVENTURER, AND THE QUEEN'S FAVOURITE.

THE royal birthday was usually kept with extraordinary splendour during the reign of Anne, but on no previous occasion was it accompanied with so much magnificence and rejoicing as on the 6th of February, 1707. Preparations were made for a general illumination, and the bent of popular feeling was proved by the fact, that wherever the queen's name appeared, it was sure to be followed by that of the hero of Blenheim

and Ramilies, while transparencies were placed in the most conspicuous situations, representing the chief events of the recent campaign. Bonfires were lighted at an early hour, and the French king, the pope, the pretender, and the devil, were paraded in effigy through the streets, and subsequently burnt.

The weather was in unison with the general festivity, being unusually fine for the season. The sky was bright and sunny, and the air had all the delicious balminess and freshness of spring. Martial music resounded within the courts of the palace, and the trampling of the guard was heard, accompanied by the clank of their accoutrements as they took their station in Saint James's Street, where a vast crowd was already collected.

About an hour before noon, the patience

of those who had taken up their positions betimes promised to be rewarded, and the company began to appear at first somewhat scantily, but speedily in great numbers. The science of the whip was not so well understood in those days as in our own times, or perhaps the gorgeous and convenient, though somewhat cumbersome vehicles then in vogue were not so manageable: but, from whatever cause, it is certain that many quarrels took place among the drivers, and frequent and loud oaths and ejaculations were poured forth.

The footpath was invaded by the chairmen, who forcibly pushed the crowd aside, and seemed utterly regardless of the ribs or toes of those who did not instantly make way for them. Some confusion necessarily ensued; but though the crowd were put to considerable inconvenience, jostled here, and

squeezed there, the utmost mirth and good-humour prevailed.

Before long, the tide of visitors had greatly increased, and coaches, chariots, and sedans, were descending in four unbroken lines towards the palace. The curtains of the chairs being for the most part drawn down, the attention of the spectators was chiefly directed to the coaches, in which sat resplendent beauties, bedecked with jewels and lace, beaux in their costliest and most splendid attire, grave judges and reverend divines in their respective habiliments, military and naval commanders in their full accoutrements, foreign ambassadors, and every variety of character that a court can exhibit. The equipages were most of them new, and exceedingly sumptuous, as were the liveries of the servants clustering behind them.

The dresses of the occupants of the coaches were varied in colour, as well as rich in material, and added to the gaiety and glitter of the scene. Silks and velvets of as many hues as the rainbow might be discovered, while there was every kind of peruke, from the courtly and modish Ramilies just introduced, to the somewhat antiquated but graceful and flowing French campaign. Neither was there any lack of feathered hats, point-lace cravats and ruffles, diamond snuff-boxes and buckles, clouded canes, and all the et cetera of beauish decoration.

Hard by the corner of Pall Mall, stood a little group, consisting of a tall, thin, plainly-dressed man, apparently belonging to the middle class of society, and a rosy-faced, short-necked individual, whose cassock and band proclaimed his reverend calling, and who had a comely woman of some forty years old under one arm, and a pretty shy-

looking damsel of less than half that age under the other.

"Here comes Sir Nathan Wright, late lord keeper of the great seal," said the tall, thin man, addressing his reverend companion, to whom he appeared to act as cicerone.

"Is that Sir Nathan, Mr. Greg?" asked the divine, gazing at a sharp-featured, well-wigged person in the coach.

"The same, Mr. Hyde," replied the other; "and as I live, he is followed by his successor, Lord Cowper, whom I needn't tell you is one of the ablest lawyers that ever wore a gown. His lordship is pretty certain, ere long, to take his seat upon the woolsack."

"Save us! who's he in the gilt charrot?" cried the young damsel just mentioned. "What a curious fine gentleman he is, and what pure fine clothes he wears!"

"That's the Earl of Sunderland, Miss Angelica," replied Greg; "secretary of state, and son-in-law to his grace of Marlborough. The countess is by his side. That angry-looking nobleman, who is thrusting his head out of the window and rating his coachman for driving so slowly, is Lord Orford, another of the ministers, and one of the ablest of them, but no great favourite with her majesty, for the reproof he administered the Prince of Denmark, on the score of his highness's mismanagement of the navy. Behind him comes the Duke of Devonshire, and after the duke, his grace of Newcastle. Next follows my master, Mr. Harley, who, if he doesn't become lord treasurer one day, wont meet with his desert. Take note of him, I pray you, Miss Angelica, for he's worth looking at."

"Oh, yes! I see him," replied An-

gelica; "but I can't see much to admire about him."

"Many of your sex have entertained a different opinion," replied Greg, with a smile. "But how do you like the young gentleman with him ?"

"Purely," replied Angelica; "purely. He's another guess sort of body."

"Who may the young man be, friend Greg?" inquired Parson Hyde.

"His name is Masham," replied Greg; "he is one of the Prince of Denmark's equerries, and considered the handsomest man at court."

"I'm sure he's the purest handsome man I've seen," cried Angelica, her eyes sparkling as she spoke. "O lud! if he isn't getting out of the coach. I hope he isn't coming to speak to me. Mother, lend me your fan to hide my face."

"Peace, you silly thing!" cried Mrs. Hyde, with a reproving look.

As she spoke, the carriage stopped, and Masham, stepping forth, closed the door after him. Greg's eulogium was not unmerited. The young equerry possessed a figure of perfect symmetry, and a countenance remarkable for delicacy and beauty. His eyes were of liquid blue, and it would seem of great power over the female heart; for as he fixed them upon Angelica, as he was detained beside her for a moment by the press, she felt hers flutter within her bosom.

His attire was not remarkable for richness, but it was tasteful, consisting of a green velvet coat, laced with gold, and a white satin waistcoat, made so low as to descend half way down the thigh, as was the mode. In lieu of a peruke, he wore his own dark brown hair gathered from the forehead, and tied with a riband behind.

Samuel Masham was of a good Essex family, his father being Sir Francis Masham, of High-Laver, Bart., and his mother a daughter of Sir William Scot, of Rouen, in Normandy, who enjoyed the title of Marquis de la Mezansene in France; but as he was an eighth son, he had little expectation either of title or property. He was not more than twenty-three, or four at most, but had been for some time about court, having been page to the queen while Princess of Denmark, and was now equerry and gentleman of the bed-chamber to Prince George.

"By your leave, my pretty lass," said he, addressing Angelica in tones which thrilled her with delight, "I would pass."

"This way, Mr. Masham, this way," said Greg, retiring, and endeavouring to clear a passage.

"Ah! Mr. Greg," cried Masham, "what are you doing here?"

"Merely come with some country cousins to see the quality go to court, sir," replied Greg.

"Faith, you'll find no brighter eyes, nor cheeks more blooming, than those you've with you," said Masham, chucking Angelica under the chin. "Those lips are cherries indeed, but I must not be seduced by them to linger here. I've a word to say to the Comte de Briançon before I enter the palace."

So saying, and with a laughing glance at Angelica, he pushed through the crowd, and entered the house at the corner of Pall Mall.

"The Comte de Briançon, whose hotel he has just entered, is the envoy-extraordinary from the Duke of Savoy," observed Greg, not a little elated at the notice taken of him and his pretty country cousin by the

handsome equerry. "I am well acquainted with his confidential secretary, Monsieur Claude Baude, who is to his master what I am to Mr. Harley. He's a charming man, Mr. Masham—eh, Miss Angelica?"

"Curiously charming," simpered the damsel.

"All the ladies think so," pursued Greg; "they're all in love with him."

"I should be surprised if they weren't," sighed Angelica.

"But, see!" pursued Greg, "here comes another handsome man, Mr. Saint-John, secretary at war. He's a terrible rake."

"A rake, is he!" cried Angelica. "Oh! gemini! then I wont look at him, for mother says a rake is worse than a roaring lion, and sure to eat one up. Tell me when he's gone, Mr. Greg, for I don't desire to lose any more of the sight than I can help."

"The roaring lion has departed," replied Greg, laughing; "and here you have the Duke of Beaufort and his beautiful duchess. Has not her grace a noble presence? The bold, proud-looking dame who follows, is the Lady Di Cecil. The three ladies laughing so loudly in yonder large coach are Lady Carlisle, Lady Effingham, and Mrs. Cross. Next comes my Lord Ross, to whom, they *do* say, Lady Sunderland is kinder than she should be; but that, I dare say, is mere scandal. Whom have we here? Faith, my Lady Fitzharding, at whose house more foolish spendthrifts are ruined at ombre and basset than at the groom-porter's."

"Oh, blind and perverse generation!" exclaimed Hyde, lifting up his eyes.

"Ah! you may well denounce them, reverend sir," replied Greg; "and here

comes further food for a homily in the shape of his grace of Grafton. Look with what an air he lolls back in his coach. His good looks have made desperate havoc among the ladies, and no one but Mrs. Onslow has been found to resist him. Next comes fat Mrs. Knight, of whom I could, if I chose, tell you a diverting history. To her succeeds my Lord Nottingham, who appears as grave as if he had not recovered his dismissal from office, though he has tried to console himself with the Signora Margaretta. In the next coach sits the proudest dame at court—her Grace of Marlborough, whose daughter she is, not excepted—it is the Duchess of Montague. Isn't she a magnificent creature? The lady who whisks past next, covered with diamonds, is Mrs. Long, Sir William Raby's sister. That handsome equipage belongs to Sir Richard

Temple—you may see him, and a fine-looking man he is. People talk of him and Mrs. Centlivre—but I say nothing. Ah! here come a brace of wits. The one nearest this way is the famous Mr. Congreve, and the other the no less famous Captain Steele. I wonder which of the two owns the chariot —neither, most probably. The fine lady who succeeds them is Mrs. Hammond, whose husband is as much of a roaring lion as Mr. Saint-John, while she is said to console herself for his neglect by the attentions of my Lord Dursley, vice-admiral of the blue, and whom you may see leaning out of the next chariot window kissing his hand to her."

While he was thus running on, Greg felt his arm pulled by Angelica, who asked him in an under-tone if he knew the strange gentleman who had just taken up his station near them.

"To be sure I do," replied Greg, looking in the direction indicated, and raising his hat as he caught the eye of the individual alluded to; "it is the Marquis de Guiscard."

"Lawk, how he stares!" whispered Angelica. "I declare he quite puts a body out of countenance."

The marquis was tall and well-formed, though somewhat meagre, with dark, piercing eyes, black bushy brows, and a pale olive face, which looked perfectly blue where the beard had been shaved from it. His features were prominent, and would have been handsome but for a certain sinister expression, the disagreeable effect of which was heightened by an insolent and rakish air. His attire was the court-dress of an officer of high rank — namely, a scarlet coat, richly embroidered with gold, and

having large cuffs; white satin waistcoat, likewise worked with gold; a point-lace cravat and ruffles, and a diamond-hilted sword. A full-flowing French peruke, a feathered hat, and a clouded cane, completed his costume.

Antoine de Guiscard, Abbé de la Bourlie, or, as he chose to style himself, Marquis de Guiscard, a scion of an ancient and noble French family, was born in the year 1658, and was consequently not far from fifty, at the period under consideration. Destined for the church, and possessed of considerable learning, he must, from his abilities and connexions, have obtained high preferment in it, if he could have placed due control on his passions. But amongst the depraved of a licentious court, he was the most depraved; and finding a priestly life too tame for him, he accompanied his brother, the

Chevalier de Guiscard, to the scene of war in Flanders. On his return from this campaign, he resumed his wild courses, and assisted the chevalier to carry off a married woman, of whom the latter became enamoured. This affair was scarcely hushed up, when he got into fresh trouble, having wounded a gentleman, a near relation of Madame de Maintenon, and killed two of his servants, while shooting; and he put the climax to his folly and violence, by subjecting a serjeant in his own regiment, whom he had suspected of theft, to the military rack—a species of torture, administered by placing burning matches between the fingers of the accused. Orders being issued for his apprehension, he consulted his safety by flight, and escaped into Switzerland, where he conceived the notion of making himself the head of the malcontents in France, and

with this view concerted measures with the leaders of the allies, to produce a general insurrection, both of Protestants and Catholics, among the Camisars, who were then in a state of agitation. The plausible representations of the marquis procured him the commission of lieutenant-general from the emperor, and thus armed, he proceeded to Turin, where, with the assistance of the Duke of Savoy, he procured four small vessels of war, which were fitted up and manned at Nice, and with which he meditated a descent on the coast of Languedoc. But tempestuous weather, and, it may be, other causes, interfered with the expedition, and the marquis, after losing one of his ships, and running great risks, returned to the court of Savoy. Here his underhand proceedings having excited the suspicion of the duke, he removed, towards the latter end of

the year 1704, to the Hague, and had several conferences with the grand-pensionary, Heinsius, and the Duke of Marlborough, who were so well satisfied with his representations, that the States General agreed to allow him the monthly pay of a hundred ducatoons. Intelligence being soon afterwards received of the Earl of Peterborough's expedition to Catalonia, the marquis hastened to join him at Barcelona, and meeting with the same success which had hitherto attended his projects, he contrived to obtain letters of recommendation from the King of Spain to the Queen of England, with which he embarked for that country. During the voyage, which was remarkably stormy, the vessel he sailed in engaged with a French privateer, and afforded the marquis a good opportunity of displaying his valour and skill, for it was mainly owing to

his resolution capture was avoided. On reaching London he was graciously received by the queen, and the royal countenance procured him the entrée to the houses of the Dukes of Devonshire and Ormond. He also speedily managed to gain the good opinion of some of the ministers, particularly Mr. Saint-John. When, therefore, a descent upon France was proposed, and troops were raised for the purpose, to be commanded by the Earl of Rivers, Guiscard received the commission of lieutenant-colonel, and had a thousand pounds furnished him for his equipments. But fortune, which had hitherto smiled upon him, began now to waver. While the confederate fleet lay at Torbay, waiting for a favourable wind, disputes arose between him and the English generals, who refused to allow him the command which he claimed, and his

ignorance of military affairs, as well as his imperfect acquaintance with the state of France, becoming apparent to Lord Rivers, he was recalled, and returning to London, remained for some time in privacy. Though his pay as lieutenant-general was discontinued, he had still his regiment, as well as his pension from the States; and taking a good house in Pall Mall, he set up a showy equipage, kept a host of servants, and commenced a career of extravagance and dissipation, which he contrived to support by play and other expedients, while he was constant in his attendance upon court, and at the levées of ministers, in search of employment and preferment.

Anxious, like most adventurers, to strengthen his precarious fortunes by an advantageous match, Guiscard had paid court to several heiresses and wealthy

widows, but hitherto without success. It was also suspected that he had other and deeper schemes in hand; and that, having made his peace with France, he had contrived to open a clandestine correspondence with the court of Saint-Germains. Though a successful gamester, the marquis indulged in other profligate excesses, which ran away with all his gains at play. Audacious and insolent in general, he could yet be cringing and supple enough, if it suited his purpose. From some of his creatures employed about the palace, he had ascertained how well Abigail Hill stood with the queen, and at once discerning her future ascendancy, he turned all his attention to winning her regard. But his efforts were fruitless. Whether she divined his scheme, or had been warned against him by Harley, she repulsed his advances, and on the rare occa-

sions of their meeting, scarcely treated him with civility. Guiscard, however, was not a man to be easily turned aside. Though his vanity was mortified by his rejection, he resolved to persevere, and to await some favourable opportunity for the further prosecution of his design.

Soon after the marquis had posted himself in the manner described, another slight disturbance occurred in the rear of Greg and his party. It was occasioned by the issuing forth of several lacqueys in gay liveries from the house at the corner of Pall Mall, before alluded to, who pushed aside the crowd with their gold-headed canes, to make way for a superbly-gilt chair, emblazoned with the arms of Savoy. As this chair was borne past the Marquis de Guiscard, the window was let down, and, amidst an atmosphere of perfume, a handsome, but dissi-

pated-looking man, wearing a magnificent French peruke, put out his head and addressed him.

"It is the Comte de Briançon himself," said Greg to his companions.

"How purely sweet he smells, to be sure," remarked Angelica. "I declare, he's just like a great scent-bottle!"

"Well, my dear Marquis! how speed you? Is the adventure over?" inquired the comte, laughing, and displaying a brilliant set of teeth.

"The lady has not yet passed," returned Guiscard. "What have you done with Masham? I thought he was in the chair with you."

"He has stayed behind to read a letter," said the comte. "You have secured the coachman, you say."

"Five guineas has done his business,"

answered Guiscard. "But, by Saint Michael! here she comes. Away, count!"

"Adieu, then, and success attend you," cried Briançon. And giving the signal to the chairmen, they moved on towards the palace.

The foregoing brief conversation, though conducted in French, was not lost upon Greg, who perfectly understood the language, and who being also well aware of the marquis's character, at once comprehended the nature of the project on which he was engaged. He looked, therefore, with some curiosity towards the approaching coaches, to see which of them contained the heroine of the expected adventure, and he was not long in making the discovery. As he scanned the line, he observed a stout, rosy-faced fellow, in a full-bottomed, powdered wig, and sky-blue livery with yellow facings,

who was seated on the hammer-cloth of a magnificent chariot, slightly raise his whip, and give a nod of intelligence to the marquis.

"There she is, I'll be sworn!" he exclaimed, stepping forward to get a better view of the equipage. "As I live! 'tis Lady Rivers. He cannot mean to give her a billet-doux in this public place. But who has she with her?—Miss Abigail Hill. Oh! I now see his mark. Egad! she looks uncommonly well."

Abigail Hill could not be called positively beautiful, and yet the expression of her countenance was so agreeable, that she deserved the epithet quite as much as many persons whose features were more classically moulded. Fine eyes of a clear blue, a radiantly white skin, auburn hair, round dimpling cheeks, and teeth as white as

pearls, constituted her attractions. Looking at her narrowly, it was seen that there was a good deal of firmness about the brow and mouth, and a steady expression in the eye, that argued determination, the proper bent of which seemed guaranteed by the rest of her face. Her quickness of manner, and vivacity of look, proclaimed the possession of a ready wit; nor were these outward indications delusive. Her figure was extremely good, slight, tall, and graceful. It was displayed in court dress of white satin, trimmed with lace, and made low, with short loose sleeves. Her age might be about four-and-twenty.

By this time, the chariot in which she rode had approached within a short distance of the Marquis de Guiscard, when the coachman, who had watched his opportunity, contrived to run against the vehicle

moving in a line with him. He was instantly assailed with the most vehement abuse for his carelessness by the neighbouring Jehu, to whom he responded in appropriate terms, charging him with being the cause of the collision. This, as he anticipated, roused the other's ire so much, that he threatened to knock him off the box. Whereupon the offender replied by an oath of defiance, accompanied by a cut with his whip. The aggrieved coachman instantly rose on his box and lashed furiously at his adversary, who, while defending himself, had much ado to restrain his horses, which began to plunge desperately.

Greatly amused by the conflict, the spectators cheered lustily, while the ladies within the carriage becoming alarmed by the noise, Abigail Hill put her head out of the window to see what was the cause of

the stoppage. At this moment, the Marquis de Guiscard rushed forward, and opening the door offered to assist her out, but on seeing him, she instinctively drew back.

Guiscard then addressed himself to Lady Rivers, but with no better success.

"Obliged to you for your offer of assistance, marquis," replied her ladyship, "but we will stay where we are. Do tell the coachman to drive on, or I will discharge him."

"Pardon, miladi," cried Guiscard. "The fellow refuses to attend to me. His island blood is up. Come, Miss Hill, I must be peremptory, and insist on your getting out. I am fearful some accident may occur."

"You are very attentive, marquis," said Abigail; "but Lady Rivers's servants are at hand, and will take care of us. Ditch-

ley," she added, to a footman, who had now approached the door—"your arm."

The man would have advanced, but the marquis motioned him angrily off. The fight, meanwhile, between the two coachmen, raged with increased fury.

"Ditchley!" screamed Lady Rivers, who now began to be seriously alarmed.

"Comin', your la'asip," replied the footman, trying to push past the marquis.

"Back, fellow!" cried Guiscard. "I warn you not to interfere."

But seeing the man resolute, and exasperated at the failure of his plan, he raised his cane, and with a well-dealt blow on the sconce, stretched the unlucky Ditchley on the ground.

Both ladies now screamed, not knowing how far the violence of the marquis might extend. At this, the three other footmen

Young Masham protecting Abigail Hill from the Marquis de Guiscard.

who were clinging behind the chariot, flew to their assistance, but another protector anticipated them. Just as Ditchley fell, Masham, who, a few moments previously, had issued from the Comte de Briançon's hotel, seeing what was going forward, made his way through the crowd, and rushing up to the carriage, caught the marquis by the collar, and thrust him forcibly aside.

"Ha! what in the devil's name brings you here, sir!" cried Guiscard, in tones almost inarticulate with rage.

"I am come to protect these ladies from affront," replied Masham, sternly, and laying his hand upon his sword.

"'Sdeath, sir,—how do you know they have been affronted?—And who constituted you their defender?" demanded Guiscard, furiously.

"I will render you full account for my

interference hereafter, marquis," replied Masham. "But if you have any pretension to the character of a gentleman, you will not carry on this dispute further in the presence of ladies."

"Be it so!" replied Guiscard, between his teeth. "But be assured you shall not escape chastisement."

"Do not involve yourself in a quarrel on my account, I pray, Mr. Masham," said Abigail, who, meanwhile, had descended from the coach, the door having been opened by one of the footmen.

"I am very happy to have been of the slightest use to you, Miss Hill," replied Masham, bowing; "and as to the quarrel, I beg you will give yourself no concern about it."

"I have seen all that passed," said a soldier, advancing, with his musket over his

shoulder, " and if it is your pleasure, sir, or that of the ladies, I will take these two quarrelsome coachmen to the guard-house."

" That would scarcely mend the matter, my good fellow," replied Masham; " but the disturbance is at an end."

" Unquestionably, so far as I am concerned," said the marquis, seeing the disadvantage in which he had placed himself, and suddenly assuming an apologetic tone. " I have been altogether in the wrong. I meant only to offer you assistance, Miss Hill, and have to implore your pardon for suffering my passion to carry me to such absurd lengths. It was yon fellow's rudeness that caused my anger. However, I am sorry for him, and hope a guinea will mend his broken pate. Mr. Masham, you have cause to thank me for the service I have rendered you—unintentionally it is

true—but a service not the less important on that account. Ladies, I salute you." And with a bow of supercilious politeness he marched off towards the palace, amid the murmurs of the bystanders.

Seeing the turn matters had taken, and the discomfiture of his employer, the coachman now thought proper to listen to reason, and to beg pardon for his share of the misadventure, while his adversary drove off. Thus reassured, Abigail resumed her seat in the coach, warmly thanking the young equerry, who assisted her into it, for his gallantry.

"Only promise me one thing, Mr. Masham," she said—"that you wont accept the marquis's challenge, if he sends one. If anything should happen to you, I shall never forgive myself."

"Have no fear," he replied, laughingly. "I shall run no risk."

"But promise me not to fight," cried Abigail. "Nay, if you hesitate, I must procure a mediator in the queen. You dare not disobey her."

"It is scarcely worth while to trouble her majesty on so unimportant a matter," returned Masham.

"The matter is not so unimportant to me," replied Abigail. And then checking herself, and blushing, she leaned back in the carriage, which rolled on towards the gateway of the palace.

"You expressed great concern for Mr. Masham, my dear," observed Lady Rivers. "If he has any vanity,—and what handsome young fellow has not?—he will fancy he has made a conquest."

"Nay, I only expressed a natural concern for him, I'm sure," replied Abigail. "I should be terribly distressed, if he were to fight this odious Marquis de Guiscard."

"And still more terribly distressed, if he should chance to get run through the body by the odious marquis, who, they say, is the most expert swordsman about town," rejoined Lady Rivers.

"Don't suppose anything so dreadful," cried Abigail, turning pale. "I will certainly mention the matter to the queen; that will be the surest way to prevent mischief."

"But take care not to betray the state of your heart to her majesty at the same time, my dear," said Lady Rivers, somewhat maliciously.

Abigail blushed again, but attempted no reply; and at this juncture the carriage stopped, the door was opened, and they were ushered into the palace.

CHAPTER III.

A TETE-A-TETE AT MARLBOROUGH HOUSE.

NEVER had a drawing-room at Saint-James's been more numerously or brilliantly attended than on the present occasion. It was remarked, however, that the queen looked somewhat jaded and out of spirits, while a slight inflammation about the eyes increased her general appearance of indisposition. Noticing these symptoms with concern, the Duke of Marlborough alluded to them to the Prince of Denmark, who replied hastily and heedlessly, as was his

wont, "The queen owes her illness to herself. If she did not sit up so late at night, her eyes would not be so red, nor her spirits so indifferent."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the duke; "I thought her majesty retired to rest early."

"So she does, generally," replied the prince, in some confusion at the indiscretion he now perceived he had committed; "but sometimes she will sit up talking for an hour or two—talking to me, your grace—merely to me—asking my opinion on matters before the cabinet—much better go to bed—late hours don't agree with either of us—ha! ha!" And he thrust his snuff-box into the duke's hand to put an end to the discourse.

Marlborough acknowledged the attention with a bow, but he muttered to himself—"She sits up o' nights, ha! Some one be-

sides the duchess is in her confidence. This must be looked to."

Later on in the day, when the drawing-room was over, the duke was alone with his illustrious lady, at Marlborough house.

The duchess was radiant. Her fine eyes sparkled with pleasure, and her cheeks were flushed with triumph. Her step, as she crossed the chamber towards a sofa at the further end of it, was prouder than usual, and her mien statelier. A magnificent woman still was Sarah of Marlborough, and little of decay was visible about her. There was something queenly in her look and deportment. Her figure was tall and commanding, and her features cast in that superb mould which seems reserved only for the great. All emotions could those features well portray, but the expression which they habitually wore was that of pride. And

yet they were soft and feminine, and not destitute of a certain character of voluptuousness, chiefly discernible in the rich fulness of the lips, and the melting languor of the eyes, which, when not lighted into fire, had inexpressible tenderness. Her forehead was exceedingly fine, and her dark hair, which was gathered like a tiara over her brow, descending in ringlets behind, retained all its original glossiness and profusion. Her proportions were full; the rounded neck, arm, and shoulder, being all of marble whiteness. Her attire corresponded in magnificence with her person, and blazed with diamonds and precious stones. Among other ornaments, she wore a ring of great value, which had been presented to her by Charles the Third of Spain, when he visited England four years before. The Duchess of Marlborough was

a woman to inspire a grand passion, and to maintain it. Neither absence nor irritation could shake the devoted attachment entertained for her by the duke, and now, after their long union, he was as much her lover as when he wooed her as Sarah Jennings.

And well was she matched by her noble lord. Not more distinguished for his mental qualifications than for his personal graces and accomplishments, was the Duke of Marlborough. A perfect courtier, in the best sense of the word, which means that he was a most refined gentleman, the duke superadded the soldier to the courtier, making a matchless combination. Nothing more polished, more graceful, more easy, or which set others more at ease, can be imagined than Marlborough's manner, while at the same time it was dignified and imposing. His figure was lofty, and nobly proportioned;

and what with his renown, his stateliness of presence, and his handsome form and features, it was impossible to look at him without admiration. True, the duke was no longer young—true, he had undergone excessive fatigue of all kinds, had been harassed in every way, and for years had known but few and brief intervals of repose; despite all this, however, he preserved his good looks in a most astonishing manner, and though no longer the fair youth who had captivated the Duchess of Cleveland in Charles the Second's day, he was still a model of manly beauty. He was habited in his general's uniform, and was richly decorated with orders, amongst which was the George, in a sardonyx set with diamonds of immense value. His spirits were by no means so high as those of the duchess. On the contrary, he looked thoughtful, and

followed her slowly and musingly to the sofa.

"What ails your grace?" cried the duchess, seating herself. "Methinks if anything could make you cheerful, it should be the acclamations with which you were greeted by the crowd, as you left the palace. Their deafening cries of, 'God save the queen and the Duke of Marlborough!' can almost be heard here, and I fancy must have reached even the ears of Anne herself. The sweetest music to me, is the applausive shouting of the people, and the most gladsome and stirring sight, their beaming faces and waving hats. But both seem to have lost their charm for you to day. Custom has staled them, as it has staled me."

"Popular applause may indeed fail to move me," replied the duke, affectionately —"perhaps does so; but the day is far dis-

tant, sweetheart, when I shall be insensible to your love. I am somewhat overcome by the tumult, and wish I had returned from the palace privately."

"Better as it is," said the duchess; "you cannot show yourself too much. Has anything happened at the drawing-room to annoy you? I thought you looked somewhat grave there."

"Well, then, I must own I have been disturbed by a few words let fall by the prince, respecting the queen. I told him I was sorry to see her look ill, and he said it was her own fault, for she would sit up late at night."

"Did he tell you with whom?" demanded the duchess.

"No," answered the duke. "Like a poor chess-player, he tried to repair his inadvertence, and therefore exposed himself

further. But I could not learn who was the queen's companion, beside himself."

"Then I will tell you," replied the duchess; "it is our cousin, Abigail Hill."

"What, the dresser and bed-chamber woman?" cried the duke; "if that be all, it is of little moment."

"It is not of such little moment as your grace imagines," replied the duchess; "and if I had known what I now know of Abigail, when I placed her near the queen, I would never have put it in her power to do me an injury. Who would have thought so artless a creature, to all appearance, could play her cards so cunningly! But the jade has discerned the queen's weak points, and seeing how much she is the slave of those who feign to love her, and will condescend to fawn upon her and flatter her for her wit and understanding—*her* wit and under-

standing, forsooth!—she has resorted to all these mean arts to win her confidence."

"If she *has* won it, you cannot blame her," replied the duke; "and I cannot help saying, if you yourself, madam, were to study the queen's temper and peculiarities more, it would be better."

"I am surprised to hear your grace talk thus," replied the duchess, bridling up. "Would you have me sacrifice my opinions to one to whom I have been accustomed to dictate? Would you have me approve measures when I disapprove them? Would you have me cringe, protest, and lie, or copy the manners of this servile creature? Would you have me listen to every childish complaint, every whim, every caprice,—or affect sympathy when I feel none? Would you have me solicit when I can command, —kneel, when I can sit,—obey, when I can exact obedience?"

"Nay—but, madam," said the duke, "the duties to your queen make what might appear servility and flattery to another, rightful homage and respect to her."

"I shall never be wanting in loyalty and devotion to the queen," replied the duchess; "and whatever opinions I offer, shall be consistent with her honour. I can never reproach myself with advising aught derogatory to her station or to the welfare of the country, and with that conviction I shall continue to act as I have begun. I may lose her regard, but I will never lose my own respect."

"I know you to be a high-minded woman, madam," replied the duke, "and that all your actions are directed by the best and noblest principles; but I still conceive that, without any sacrifice of moral dignity or

self-respect, you might more effectually retain her majesty's regard."

"Your grace mistakes the queen altogether," replied the duchess, impatiently: "and were I to yield to her humour, or subscribe to her opinion, things would be in a far worse position than they are now. Anne is one of those persons who, if allowed to have her own way, or act upon her own impulses, would be sure to go wrong. Without energy or decision, she is so short-sighted that she can only discern what is immediately before her, and even then is pretty sure to err in judgment. To serve her well, she must be led—to make her reign prosperous and glorious, she must be ruled."

"My own experience leads me to the same conclusion as yourself, madam," said the duke; "but this principle must not be carried too far. Weak natures like that of

Anne must not be pressed too hardly, or they will rebel against the hand that governs them. I have observed some indications of this sort of late about the queen. She seems displeased with you."

"And what matter if she be displeased with me?" replied the duchess, somewhat contemptuously; "she may be piqued for the moment, but I am too necessary to her, land, indeed, too much her mistress, for any lasting breach to occur between us."

"Be not over-confident, madam," returned the duke. "Security is often fatal. Security lost the battle of Blenheim to Tallard; and to Villeroy's security I owe the victory of Ramilies. To trust too much is to give your enemy an advantage, and defeat may occur when there is least appearance of danger. It is true that the queen has hitherto submitted to your governance in

all things, but her advisers may turn your very power against you. I am so much of a Jesuit, in one sense, that if the object I had in view were praiseworthy, and I was satisfied on that score, I should not look too scrupulously at the means by which the great end was to be accomplished. Some concessions must be made to the queen—some change in your deportment towards her, or I am apprehensive you will lose her favour."

"If I must lose it, I must," replied the duchess. "But I will never retain it by imitating these truckling slaves—these minions who would crouch to the earth for a smile. It shall never be said of Sarah of Marlborough, that she adopted the abject policy of Abigail Hill,—and she only feels surprised that her lord should give her such council."

"I recommend no abject policy," replied the duke, a little nettled by her tone. "But firmness is one thing, imperiousness another. It is not in human nature, still less in the nature of one of such exalted rank, to submit to the control you impose upon Anne."

"Be content to rule in the camp, my lord," said the duchess, "and leave the queen to me. I have hitherto proved successful."

"But you are on the eve of a defeat," cried the duke. "I warn you of that, madam."

"Your grace is as impatient as her majesty," said the duchess, tauntingly.

"And with as much reason," cried the duke, rising and pacing the apartment.

"I have been a faithful and loving wife to you, my lord, and a faithful and loving friend and servant to the queen," replied

the duchess, "and I cannot alter my conduct to please either of you."

"You rule us both with an iron rod," cried Marlborough; "and my own feelings of irritation make me perfectly comprehend those of the queen."

"As I do not desire to quarrel with your grace, I will leave you till you are cooler," said the duchess, rising, and moving towards the door.

"Nay, you shall not go," cried the duke, catching her hand. "I have been hasty—wrong. By Heaven! I do not wonder you govern Anne so absolutely, for I have no will but yours."

"Nor I any law but yours, my lord," answered the duchess, smiling. "You know that, and therefore yield to me—*sometimes*. And so does her majesty."

"If she loves you as truly as I do, Sarah,"

returned Marlborough, tenderly, "you have nothing to fear. My passion borders on idolatry, and I could be anything in your hands, if the reward for it was to be your love. The letters I have sent you, written amid the hurry and exhaustion of rapid marches—amid the vexations of opposing interests—on the agitating eve of battle, or in the intoxication of victory, would prove to you that you were ever foremost in my thoughts, but they could not speak the full extent of my feelings. Oh, Sarah! fortunate as my career has been, and much as I ought yet to do to serve my queen and country, I would far rather retire with you to some quiet retreat, where we might pass the remainder of our life undisturbed by faction, or the cares of public life."

"Your grace would not be happy in such an existence,—nor should I," replied the

duchess. "We were made for greatness. The quiet retreat you propose would become a prison, where you would be tormented by a thousand stirring thoughts of conquests yet unachieved, and laurels yet unwon; while I should lament the ascendancy I had lost, and the power I had thrown aside. No, no, my lord—much is to be done—much to be won before we retire. It will be time to quit our posts when our acquisitions can no longer be increased. When I have made you the wealthiest noble, as you are the first in Europe, I shall be satisfied; but not till then."

"You are a woman in a thousand," cried the duke, in admiration.

"I am worthy to be the wife of the Duke of Marlborough," she answered, proudly; "and my lord may safely repose his honour and interests with me. I will watch well over both."

"I doubt it not, madam," cried the duke, in a voice of emotion, and pressing her hand to his lips—"I doubt it not. But I would you had never placed Abigail near the queen."

"My motive for doing so was this," replied the duchess. "I was fatigued to death with attendance upon her majesty; and to speak truth, after your grace's elevation to a principality of the empire, I thought the office derogatory. Abigail was therefore introduced as the fittest and safest person to fill my place. That I could not have made a worse selection I now find. The wench has begun to comport herself towards me with a degree of insolence that argues the reliance she places on the queen's protection. Add to which, I have discovered that an understanding subsists between her and her kinsman, Harley."

"Godolphin and I have for some time doubted Harley," returned the duke, "and have been anxious for his removal from the ministry. But the queen has clung to him with a tenacity till now unaccountable."

"Your grace had once a high opinion of this secretary," said the duchess, "but I always warned you against him as a smooth-tongued hypocrite, who had merely his own advancement in view. Now, I hope you are convinced?"

"Most unpleasantly so," rejoined the duke. "But how do you suppose Harley communicates with Abigail?"

"I intercepted a note from her to him this morning at the drawing-room," said the duchess.

"A love letter?" asked Marlborough.

"No; a few words hastily traced in pencil, desiring him to be at the garden gate

of the palace at eleven to-morrow night," said the duchess.

"That sounds like an appointment!" cried the duke.

"Ay, but it is not with herself," said the duchess. "He is to come there to see the queen. Of that I am well assured. But I will surprise them. Having the key of the back staircase, I can easily be present at the conference."

"You had better think this over," said Marlborough. "The queen may resent the intrusion."

"I have already told your grace you know her not. She is far more in awe of me than I am of her, and with reason. If she were not ashamed of Harley, she would not receive him thus clandestinely. My discovery of the intercourse will be quite sufficient to put an end to it."

"I hope so," replied the duke. "But while Abigail enjoys her favour, there will always be danger. Can we not provide her a husband?"

"Hum!" exclaimed the duchess.

At this juncture, a servant entered and announced the Earl of Sunderland.

"Glad to see you, son-in-law," said the duke, extending his hand to him. "We were talking of marrying our cousin, Abigail Hill."

"What, to the Marquis de Guiscard! who attempted to carry her off in the face of all the world this morning," cried Sunderland, "and was only prevented by the interference of young Masham, the prince's equerry?"

"Ah! how was that?" inquired the duchess.

And the earl proceeded to detail the occurrence.

"Guiscard is a dangerous man," said the duke; "and if he cannot rid himself of a rival by fair means, will not hesitate to have recourse to foul. I heard a strange character of him at the Hague; but he is brave, and useful for certain purposes. I'll warrant me it is suspicion of Abigail's favour with the queen that makes him pay court to her. Otherwise, she could have no attraction to an adventurer like him."

"Lord Ross, who mentioned the circumstance to Lady Sunderland," said the earl, "and who had it from Lady Rivers, declared that Abigail was quite taken by Masham."

"Ah, indeed!" said the duchess. "Something may be made of this hint. Are you acquainted with Mr. Masham, my lord?"

"Quite sufficiently for any purpose your grace may require," replied Sunderland.

"Make it your business to find him out,

then, and bring him here to dinner," rejoined the duchess.

"You forget the ball this evening at the palace?" interposed the duke.

"No I do not," replied the duchess; "and I will thank your grace to send a card of invitation, without delay, to the Marquis de Guiscard. I will explain my motives presently. I depend upon you, Sunderland."

"Your behests shall be obeyed, madam, if possible," replied the earl, who was accustomed, like all the duchess's family, to render blind obedience to her. "I think I heard Masham was gone with Harley and some others to the Cocoa Tree. I'll seek him there at once."

CHAPTER IV.

THE BALL AT THE PALACE, AND WHAT HAPPENED AT IT.

THE ball at the palace in the evening was as brilliantly attended as the drawing-room had been, though of course less numerously. Adjoining the grand saloon where dancing was going forward, was a small apartment hung with green silk, woven with gold, whence it obtained the name of the "green chamber," in which, by the subdued light of shaded candles, might be discovered, seated on a fauteuil, a finely-formed but

somewhat full proportioned lady, attired in a robe of purple velvet, of the particular dye devoted to royalty. Around her smooth throat, which lost little by the contrast, was twined a string of the largest and most beautiful pearls, while across her fair rounded shoulders glittered the collar of the George. Her dress was worn low in front, as was the mode—and the style perfectly suited the wearer, who was remarkable for the beauty of her bust. The upper part of the stomacher was edged with stiffened point lace, as were the short loose sleeves of the gown. Here again the mode was favourable to the wearer, whose arms were of Junonian roundness and whiteness. Her hair, dark brown in colour, and of a fine texture, was divided in the centre, but raised in high and ample curls above the head, and being looped behind by a string

of pearls as magnificent as those encircling her throat, descended in thick waving ringlets down her back. Her complexion was fresh and rosy—its bloom derived from health and nature only—her features regular, with a small, delicate mouth, and agreeably-moulded chin. Her eyes were good, but disfigured by a slight contraction of the lids, while a heaviness about the brow gave a somewhat cloudy expression to her countenance. The Duchess of Marlborough says, in the character bequeathed by her of Anne—"There was something of majesty in her look, but mixed with a sullen and constant frown, that plainly betrayed a gloominess of soul, and a cloudiness of disposition within." But this was written after the painter of the portrait had, by her own imprudence, called a "constant frown" to the countenance.

Anne's manners were dignified, graceful, and easy, and her embonpoint rather added to the majesty of her deportment than detracted from it. In stature, she was of the middle size. In a much less exalted sphere of life, Anne would have been admired for her accomplishments and personal attractions, which were by no means inconsiderable. In earlier days, she had danced remarkably well, and accompanied herself in singing on the guitar—an instrument then much in vogue, which she played with consummate skill. The tones of her voice were singularly clear and harmonious, and, like her illustrious successor in modern times, she was distinguished by the admirable delivery of her speeches to parliament.

Anne's private virtues have already been dwelt upon. She was a model of conjugal affection, amiable, devout, charitable, and

an excellent economist; insomuch that her treasury was always well provided. A lover of polite letters, and a true friend to the church, her bounty in surrendering the tithes and first-fruits in augmentation of poor vicarages must ever cause her name to be held in grateful remembrance by the clergy. At the period in question she was in her forty-third year.

Not far from the queen, at a small card-table, sat her consort, Prince George of Denmark, playing at picquet with Mr. Harley. A slight description must suffice for the prince. Stout, with large, handsome, good-humoured features, he seemed to be fonder of play, and the pleasures of the table, than the cares and perplexities of sovereignty. Apart from his constitutional apathy and indolence, the prince had many good qualities. He was humane, just, affable,

and had the welfare of the country sincerely at heart. Rarely offering advice to the queen, or interfering between her and her ministers; when he did so, his opinion was well considered. His was a character rather to inspire esteem than respect, and Anne loved him more for the qualities of his heart than regarded him for those of his head. He was dressed in black velvet, with a star upon his breast, and wore the blue riband, and the garter.

The Duchess of Ormond, Lady Portmore, and Lady Rivers, were in attendance on the queen; and somewhat nearer to her than the rest, stood Abigail Hill, with whom she was conversing. A concert of singers from the Italian Opera, with which Anne had been much diverted, was just over, and she was still talking of the pleasure she had received from it when the Duchess of Marlbroough entered.

"Ah! you are come at last," said Anne. "I feared I was not to see your grace to-night."

"Your majesty knows I have little taste for music," returned the duchess, and I therefore postponed my arrival till after the concert, which I knew would take place at ten."

"Better late than not at all, certainly," rejoined Anne; "but I have missed you."

"Your majesty is infinitely obliging," said the duchess, sarcastically—"and I fear sacrifices your sincerity at the shrine of complaisance; for I can scarcely believe I can have been missed when I find you in company so much more congenial to your taste than mine has become."

"If you mean Abigail," replied the queen, slightly colouring, "she has indeed proved herself pleasant company, for she

loves music as much as myself, and we have been talking over the charming songs we have just heard."

"You have heard of Abigail's adventure on her way to the drawing-room this morning, I presume, madam?" said the duchess.

"I have," replied the queen, "and have taken care that the quarrel between the Marquis de Guiscard and Mr. Masham shall proceed no further."

"Your majesty is very considerate," said the duchess; "but it would have been as well, methinks, if the young lady had made me, her kinswoman, acquainted with the occurrence."

"In imparting the matter to her majesty, I thought I had done all that was needful," rejoined Abigail; "and I should not have interfered in the matter if I had not feared that harm might befal——"

"Mr. Masham," supplied the duchess, maliciously. "But you need not have given yourself uneasiness. The Marquis de Guiscard has been with me to express his regret at what has occurred, and I must confess his explanation appears satisfactory. He says that some misapprehension of his intention, on your part, made you treat him in such manner as led to the violence which he regrets, and for which he is most anxious to apologize."

"I had no misapprehension of his intentions," said Abigail—"none whatever."

"If you mean to insinuate that he is in love with you," returned the duchess, "I must admit that you are in the right, for he owned as much to me, and entreated me to plead his cause with you. For my own part, I think the offer a good one, and, as your relation, should be pleased to see the

union take place. If you yourself are willing, cousin, her majesty, I am persuaded, will not refuse her consent."

"I certainly should not refuse my consent if I thought Abigail's happiness at all concerned," replied the queen; "but in the present instance such does not appear to be the case. Nay, I almost fancy I should please her best by withholding it."

"Your majesty is in the right," replied Abigail; "and even if you were to lay your injunctions upon me to wed the Marquis de Guiscard, I do not think I could obey you."

"Your devotion shall not be so severely taxed," said the queen, smiling.

"Yet the marquis should not be rejected too hastily," said the duchess. "You behaved somewhat rudely to him this morning, Abigail—his gallantry deserved a better return."

"It is easy for the contriver of a scheme to play it out," said Abigail. "What if I tell your grace that Lady Rivers's coachman has since confessed to being bribed by the marquis to act as he did?"

"The fellow must lie!" cried the duchess, angrily. "But the truth shall be instantly ascertained, for the marquis is without. May he be permitted to enter the presence?"

"Why—yes," replied the queen, reluctantly, "if your grace desires it."

"I *do* desire it," returned the duchess. And stepping into the ball-room, she returned the next moment with Guiscard.

Notwithstanding his effrontery, the marquis looked abashed at the presence in which he stood; he glanced uneasily towards the queen, and from her to Abigail, beneath whose steadfast, contemptuous look, he quailed.

"My cousin Abigail declares you bribed Lady Rivers's coachman to occasion this disturbance, marquis," said the duchess. "Is it so?"

"I will frankly confess it is," replied Guiscard, with an air of candour; "and the impulse that prompted me to the act, I will with equal frankness admit, was my passion for the lovely Abigail. I hoped by this means to make a favourable impression upon her. But I have been sufficiently punished for my temerity by failure."

There was a moment's pause, during which a glance passed between the queen and the Duchess of Marlborough.

"You did wrong, marquis," said the former, at length; "but the admission of the motive is something."

"I have nothing to plead in extenuation of my conduct, but the excess of my passion,

madam," rejoined the marquis, penitently. I entreat Miss Hill's forgiveness."

"I would willingly accord it," she answered, "if I felt assured there would be no repetition of the annoyance."

"Let me play the mediator, Abigail," interposed the duchess.

"Your grace will waste time," rejoined Abigail. "I am surprised that a person of the marquis's spirit should persevere, where he sees there is no chance of success. A well-executed retreat, as the Duke of Marlborough would tell him, is equal to a victory. Let him retire while he can do so with a good grace."

"You have had your answer, marquis," said the queen, smiling.

"I have, madam," replied Guiscard, bowing to hide his mortification. "But a monarch of my own country, and one who

had the reputation of understanding your sex thoroughly, having left it on record that woman is changeable, and that he is a fool who takes her at her word, and my own experience serving to prove the truth of the assertion, I shall not be discouraged, though at present rebuffed."

"I must at least interdict you from pressing your suit further," said the queen.

"Agreed, madam," returned Guiscard; "but what if I have the fair Abigail's consent?"

"In that case, of course the interdiction is withdrawn," replied the queen.

"She shall yet be yours," said the duchess, in a whisper, to Guiscard.

"I know on whom I rely," returned the marquis, in the same tone. "I would rather have your grace's word than the lady's own promise."

"And you would choose rightly," said the duchess, smiling.

As the words were uttered, the party was increased by the entrance of the Earl of Sunderland and Masham. The latter looked somewhat flushed and excited.

"Ah, Mr. Masham!" cried the queen, "you are come most opportunely. I wish to make you friends with the Marquis de Guiscard."

"Your majesty is very kind and condescending," replied Masham, "but I am already reconciled to him."

"I am happy to hear it," rejoined Anne; "but I was not aware you had met."

"Oh dear, yes, madam!" returned Masham; "we both dined at Marlborough House, and are the best friends imaginable. Instead of quarrelling, we have laughed heartily at the adventure of the morning.

If I had known the marquis's motive, I should not have interfered."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Abigail, with a look of ill-disguised vexation.

"You surely do not think he was justified in what he did, Mr. Masham?" said the queen.

"In love and war, I need not remind your majesty, all stratagems are fair," replied Masham, bowing.

"You are a very unaccountable person, Mr. Masham," said Abigail, in a tone of pique.

"I am not the only unaccountable person in the world, Miss Hill," he replied, significantly.

"There seems to be some misunderstanding here," interposed Harley, who had just finished his game, rising from the card-table—"can I set it right?"

"Where others fail, doubtless Mr. Harley

can succeed," observed the duchess, sarcastically.

"I will try, madam, at all events," replied the secretary. "You appear put out of the way, my dear?" he added, to Abigail.

"Oh, not in the least, cousin," she replied, quickly.

"And you?" he continued, turning to Masham.

"Oh, not in the least," was the answer; "unless, indeed," he added, "for making a fool of myself, and spoiling sport."

"But you really appear to require some explanation," said Harley; "and I am sure Miss Hill will afford it."

"You are giving yourself very needless trouble, sir," said Masham, coolly; "I have had all the explanation I require."

"And I have given all I design to afford," said Abigail, with affected indifference.

"Very adroitly managed, indeed, Mr.

Secretary," laughed the duchess. "You have set matters right very expeditiously, it must be owned."

"Perhaps I might be more successful," interposed Anne, good-naturedly.

"Oh, no, indeed, your majesty!" said Abigail. "I begin to think I was wrong, after all, about the Marquis de Guiscard."

"She relents!" whispered the duchess to the marquis.

"Not so," he replied, in the same tone; "that was merely said to pique Masham."

"Never mind why it was said, if it promotes your object," rejoined the duchess. "Go to her at once. If you succeed in irritating Masham past reconciliation, all will be well."

"There's my hand, marquis, in token of forgiveness," said Abigail to Guiscard.

"You are wrong, cousin," whispered

Harley, "and will repent what you are doing."

"No, I shan't," she replied, in the same tone.

Further asides were interrupted by the advance of the marquis, who took Abigail's hand and pressed it respectfully to his lips.

"You were right; she is a mere coquette," said Masham to Sunderland, in a tone almost sufficiently loud to be audible to the others.

"Why—yes. I thought you could easily discover it," replied the earl.

"May I be permitted to claim your hand for the dance, Miss Hill, now that I have possession of it?" said the marquis.

"If her majesty will allow me, yes"—hesitated Abigail.

"You see I have the young lady's consent, madam," said Guiscard to the queen.

"I trust, therefore, you will graciously withdraw your interdiction?"

"Abigail must use her own discretion," replied Anne. "I think you are wrong in dancing with him," she added, in an undertone to her.

"I have a motive for it, madam," replied Abigail, in the same voice. "I have succeeded in vexing him," she added aside, to Harley, as she passed.

"You have lost him," he rejoined, angrily.

"Well, no matter, I shall not break my heart about him," she returned. And dropping a profound courtesy to the queen, she tripped into the ball-room with Guiscard.

"On my soul, I begin to think her a coquette, myself," muttered Harley. "She will ruin all my plans. I must speak to Masham."

"I will myself proceed to the ball-room," said the queen, rising, and taking the arm of her royal consort. "Your grace will attend me?"

The duchess bowed, and extending her hand to Masham, said—"Come, sir, you must go with me."

And, with a glance of triumph at the discomfited secretary, she followed the queen into the ball-room.

Another attempt was made by Harley to bring about a reconciliation between Abigail and Masham, but it proved as unsuccessful as the first. The young equerry was so piqued that he devoted himself exclusively to the beautiful Countess of Sunderland, who, having received a hint to that effect from her mother, took care not to discourage his attentions, and finally carried him away in triumph with her and the earl to supper.

Foiled in this quarter, Harley turned to Abigail; but she was equally engrossed by the marquis, laughed loudly at his remarks, and appeared so much amused and interested by him, that the secretary was completely puzzled, and began to consider what course he should adopt.

"If she really likes Guiscard," he thought, "I must make a friend of him betimes. But I cannot believe it. She admitted to me that she was pleased with Masham—and her looks said more than her words. And yet she acts in this unaccountable manner. But a woman never knows her own mind for an hour together, and why should I expect more from her than from the rest of her sex? I never knew a plot miscarry, but a woman had some share in it. I have no special regard for Masham, but he would be better than this intriguing Frenchman,

who will speedily ruin Abigail and himself. And this the duchess well knows, and therefore she befriends him. I must put an end to the silly scene at once."

But he found it no such easy matter. Abigail would neither attend to his glances, nor listen to his whispered remonstrances, and he was forced to retire in some confusion, for he felt that the eyes of the duchess were upon him. Venting his anger in muttered maledictions against the sex, he returned to the green closet, which was now entirely deserted, and pondered over what had occurred, and upon the best means of retaliating upon his enemy.

While occupied with these reflections, he was surprised by the entrance of Guiscard, and the Comte de Briançon. The latter threw himself into a chair near the picquet table, and taking up the cards, affected to

examine them, while the marquis hastily advanced to Harley.

"What! quitted your fair partner already, marquis?" cried the secretary. "I thought it was an engagement for the evening."

"Miss Hill has rejoined the queen," answered Guiscard, "and, seeing you enter this room, I thought it a favourable opportunity to have a word with you, Mr. Harley."

The secretary bowed somewhat stiffly.

"I have reason to think my attentions are not disagreeable to Miss Hill," pursued the marquis; "you are her cousin, Mr. Harley."

"Miss Hill will dispose of herself without consulting me, marquis," replied the secretary, drily; "but you had better address yourself to her other cousin, the Duchess of Marlborough."

"I am sure of the duchess' consent," rejoined Guiscard; "but, as I have a particular regard for you, Mr. Harley, and would not do anything for the world disagreeable to you, I wish to ascertain your sentiments as to the connexion."

"The alliance is too advantageous, and too exalted, not to be gratifying to me, marquis," said Harley, sarcastically.

"Apart from my regard for Miss Hill," continued Guiscard, "one of my chief pleasures in the union,—should I be so fortunate as to obtain her hand,—would be that it would enable me to serve you, Mr. Harley, as effectually as I desire to do."

"Really, marquis, I am more indebted to you than I can well express," rejoined Harley, in a tone of incredulous contempt; "but I apprehend that your understanding with a certain great lady, with whom I have

the misfortune to differ on some points, will rather interfere with your obliging desire to serve me."

"There is no understanding between the duchess and me, I assure you, Mr. Harley," replied Guiscard, "or if there is," he added, lowering his tone, and assuming a confidential manner, "I do not consider myself bound by it. The duchess only uses me for her own purposes, and I am, therefore, under no obligation to her. But I *could* be grateful to one who would serve me from a better motive."

"You would need a clearer lantern than that of Diogenes to find out a disinterested friend at a court, marquis," replied Harley, with a sneer. "If I were to aid you, it would be upon the same terms as the duchess."

"Will you aid me upon her terms?" asked Guiscard, eagerly.

"Hum!" exclaimed Harley. "What faith have I in your professions?"

"This is no place for explanation, sir," replied Guiscard, hurriedly and earnestly, "but though my conduct may appear that of a double-dealer, I can easily prove my sincerity. Our sentiments on many points I know to be the same. We have each of us a secret regard for an exiled family——"

"Hush!" exclaimed Harley, raising his finger to his lips, and glancing uneasily at the Comte de Briançon, whose back was towards them, and who still appeared occupied with the cards.

"He hears us not," said Guiscard, "and if he does, nothing is to be feared from him. He is in my confidence. Whenever you please, you shall receive satisfactory assurances of my good faith, and, in the meanime, I entreat you to place reliance in me.

Motives of policy, which must be obvious to you, have induced me to join, apparently, with the duchess. I now offer myself to you, being persuaded that without you I shall never obtain Miss Hill's hand."

"It would be unfair to contradict you, marquis," replied the secretary. "Without my aid, I do not think you will obtain it."

"Then hear me, Mr. Harley," said Guiscard; "if I am successful in gaining my object through you, I will devote myself wholly to your service. If you do not drive out Lord Godolphin, and occupy his post, it shall not be my fault."

"While you and Madame la Maréchale supplant the Duke and Duchess of Marlborough—eh, marquis! Egad, Saint-James's will then really boast its Concini and Galigai, and our gracious sovereign shine forth a second Marie de Medicis."

"Sir!" exclaimed Guiscard, angrily.

"Nay, I am but jesting," replied Harley, seriously. "I must have time to think the proposal over. You have taken me by surprise. Come to me to-morrow, and you shall have an answer."

"At what hour?" asked the marquis.

"About noon," replied Harley.

"I will not fail," said Guiscard; "and remember it rests with yourself to make me an assured friend or a determined enemy."

"I perfectly understand you, marquis," rejoined Harley; "and now we will separate, or we may be observed. Ah! the duchess."

"What! in close conference with Mr. Harley, marquis?" cried the duchess, entering the closet. "You are talking treason, I am certain."

"Not of your grace, at all events," re-

plied Guiscard, with perfect assurance; "nor, indeed, of any one. Mr. Harley has been professing an obliging interest in my suit to Miss Hill."

"And you believe him?" said the duchess. "If he speaks the truth, he must have suddenly changed his mind."

"Sudden changes of opinion *do* occur, your grace," rejoined the secretary.

"You are right," replied the duchess, significantly. "And it is well when we know from the first whom we have to deal with," she added, glancing at Guiscard; "one cannot then be deceived."

"True," replied the marquis. "She suspects me," he added, to himself.

At this moment, the queen and her ladies, together with the prince and his attendants, entered the closet, and while Anne seated herself on the fauteuil, the duchess drew

near the Earl of Sunderland, and said to him, in an undertone—

"I have just overheard a perfidious proposal made by Guiscard to Harley. Whether it has been accepted or not I could not ascertain. But it is clear the fellow is not to be trusted."

"I could have told your grace that before," replied the earl; "but he will answer your present purpose as well as a better man, and will be more easily shaken off afterwards. It will enchant me if he persuades Harley to league with him. There can be little doubt, then, of the match taking place, and equal certainty of Abigail's immediate dismissal. To further this, let me entreat you not to let either Guiscard or Harley perceive that you suspect the existence of an understanding between them. Both are eyeing you narrowly."

The duchess nodded, and, quitting her son-in-law, beckoned the marquis to her, and by the carelessness of her manner, and the friendly remarks she made upon the prosperous progress of his suit with Abigail, speedily removed his misgivings. Not so Harley. His constant practice of dissimulation rendered him distrustful of others, and he said to himself—

"I am not to be so easily duped. I saw by the duchess's looks when she came in, that she had overheard what passed between us, or suspected it, and set down Guiscard as a traitor. She has changed her plans since, probably owing to Sunderland's advice. But it wont do—at least with me. What if I mislead them, and seem to combine with this intriguing Frenchman? It shall be so. Where practicable, one should never fail to play off an adversary's card against himself."

Soon after this, the queen retired, the company dispersed, and the duchess returned to Marlborough House well satisfied with the result of her schemes.

CHAPTER V.

A PEEP BELOW STAIRS AT MARLBOROUGH HOUSE.

On the morning after the ball at the palace, and just as the clock of old St. Martin's Church (for the present structure was not then erected) was striking eight, Mr. Proddy, the queen's coachman, issued from the Royal Mews at Charing Cross, and bent his steps towards Marlborough House.

A little man was Mr. Proddy—a very little man—but great, exceedingly great in his own estimation; indeed, it may be doubted whether the lord-treasurer enter-

tained a higher opinion of his post or himself, than did Mr. Proddy. Nature had been singularly kind to him, and if she did not actually design him for his exalted situation, she formed him in such a manner as ensured his elevation to it. She coloured his gills with the blushing hues ordinarily bestowed on the turkey-cock; moulded him after the fashion of a Bacchus on a rum-puncheon; and kindly limited his growth to four feet nothing.

Not insensible, it has been said, to these natural advantages, was Mr. Proddy. No man was prouder of his calves, or set greater value on his paunch, or took more pains to nourish the genial tinting of his cheek. He felt it incumbent upon him to strut in his gait, when called upon by necessity to walk; to nod slightly, very slightly—if he encountered a friend; to eye disdainfully all

other persons who might cross his path; and to cock his nose, which being small and snubby, suited the action well, and thrust out his under lip and double-chin in a manner that should leave no one in doubt as to his self-importance.

Great was little Mr. Proddy on his feet, but he was greater far on the box. To see him seated on the hammer-cloth of the royal state-carriage, in all the glories of his rich livery, his laced three-cornered hat, his bouquet, and his flaxen wig, contrasting so happily with his rubicund face, with his little fat legs fixed upon the splashing-board, and his eight milk-white horses in hand,—this was a sight worth beholding. All the dignity of all the coachmen in the kingdom seemed then to be concentred in Mr. Proddy. He was deaf to the shouts of admiring crowds; but you saw a smile of ineffable

consequence irradiate his cheek and chin, and twinkle in his round protruding eyes, while he now and then addressed a brief injunction to the grooms at the horses' heads in the tone of a general issuing orders to his aides-de-camp. Once, and once only, did he forget himself, and this was on the occasion of the queen's recent visit to Saint Paul's, to return thanks for the victory of Ramilies, when the name of Proddy being shouted forth in feminine accents near Temple Bar, he looked up for a moment, and recognising some familiar face, winked in reply. But this discomposure was momentary, and is merely mentioned to shew that the great are not entirely free from the infirmities that beset other less distinguished mortals.

We must now follow Mr. Proddy up Pall Mall, along which he was slowly marching,

or to speak more correctly, waddling, with one hand thrust up to the thumb in his waistcoat-pocket, and the other sustaining the stem of a yard of clay, from which he was drawing huge whiffs, and expelling them at the noses of the casual passengers. The hour being early, he was somewhat in dishabille, and wore only a white calico jacket, crimson plush breeches, and stockings, drawn above the knee. His shirt was unbuttoned, and as his little white wig merely covered the top of his head, it gave to view the back of a neck, precisely resembling in colour and expanse the same region in a scalded pig. The wig was crowned by a velvet cap, bound with gold, and having an immense neb.

On arriving at the first street running into Saint James's-square, Mr. Proddy halted, and dispatched a youthful shoe-

black, who had posted himself there with his implements, for a mug of ale; armed with which he crossed over the way, and entered the gates of Marlborough House.

Descending the area, he paused for a moment at the open door of a room adjoining the kitchen, where a prodigious clatter of knives and forks arose from a side-table, at which a number of servants were seated, headed by a stout, red-faced personage, in a white nightcap, white jacket, and white apron, who was occupied, at the moment, in carving a magnificent sirloin of beef.

"What, hard at work, I perceive, Mr. Fishwick," said Proddy, nodding graciously at the cook; "beginning the day well."

"Tolerably, Mr. Proddy—tolerably," replied Fishwick, returning the other's salutation by taking off his nightcap, and replacing it on his bald pate. "Wont you sit

down, sir, and eat a mouthful with us? This beef is delicious, and as fat and juicy as a haunch of ven'son."

"I've not much appetite, Mr. Fishwick," returned Proddy, despondingly; — "not much, sir."

"Sorry to hear it," said Fishwick, shaking his head. "Should be afraid I was in a bad way, if I made a poor breakfast. Sit down and try. Here's a cold pork-pie—or some fried sassages, or a slice of ham or tongue may tempt you."

"Take a cup o' chocolate with me, Mr. Proddy," said a buxom, middle-aged woman, who might possibly be the housekeeper, at the lower end of the table, "it'll fortify you."

"Better have a dish o' tea with me, Mr. Proddy," interposed a much younger person, with a good deal of the air of a lady's-maid

iu her dress and manner; "it's good for the narves, you know."

"Obleeged to you, Mrs. Tipping; and to you, too, Mrs. Plumpton," replied Proddy; "but I'm not troubled with narves, and I don't want fortifyin'. Thank'ee all the same as though I did. But I'll tell 'ee what I *will* take, Mr. Fishwick, if you'll allow me, and that's a toast with my ale."

"You shall have it in a trice," replied the cook, issuing the necessary orders to one of his subalterns. And having done this, he relinquished his knife and fork to a footman near him, and went up to Proddy.

"Truth is, I drank rather too much punch last night, Mr. Fishwick," said the latter, in a low tone, "in wishin' the queen—God bless her!—many happy returns of the day; and I feel rather queasy this mornin', in consequence. Serjeant Scales and I supped

together, and right jolly we were, I can promise you. We became sworn brothers at last, and I'm come to talk matters over wi' him now. Adzookers, he's a man of information, the serjeant."

"By the mass, is he!" returned Fishwick—"a man of parts, as one may say. He loves his glass a little too well; but that's his only fault."

"I cannot account that a fault, Fishwick," rejoined Proddy. "Serjeant Scales seems of a cheerful and convivial turn, like myself. But nothin' more,—nothin' more."

"Far be it from me to blame him for his conviviality," said the cook, laughing. "He's a pleasant man always; but never so pleasant as with a glass in his hand, for then he loves to fight his battles over again; and to hear him tell what he has seen and done is as good as reading a newspaper.

Lord love you, he has been with the duke in all his campaigns in the Low Countries, and elsewhere, and has received as many as seventeen wounds in different parts of the body! I've seen 'em myself, so I can speak to it. He has a bullet in each of his legs, and another in his shoulder; and you yourself must have remarked the great cut across his nose. I believe his nose was sliced right off, and afterwards pieced to the face; but however that may be, he had the satisfaction of killing the Bavarian dragoon that wounded him. As to the Mounseers, he has sent a score of 'em, at least, to the devil. He hates a Frenchman as heartily as he loves brandy."

"I honour him for the feeling, Mr. Fishwick," said Proddy. "I hate them Mounseers myself consumedly."

"The serjeant's a perfect gazette in him-

self," pursued Fishwick, "and can relate all the duke said at this place, and all he did at that; how he marched here, and encamped there; what force he had at all his engagements; how he planned his battles, and what skilful manœuvres he executed; how, if numbers could have gained the day, the French ought to have beaten *him*, but how, on the contrary, they always got beaten *themselves*. In short, he'll shew you, as plain as a pikestaff, what it is that makes the Duke of Marlborough the great general he is."

"I can tell you that, Fishwick"—rejoined Proddy;—"its SKILL. Just the same as makes me a better coachman than any other man. The duke is cut out for the head of an army, just as I'm cut out for the queen's coach-box."

"Exactly!" replied Fishwick, scarcely

able to suppress a laugh. "But I haven't quite done with the serjeant yet. His memory's so good, that he can tell you how many of the enemy were killed in each battle — how many standards were taken, how many cannon, how many firelocks, how many swords, how many pikes, gorgets, and bayonets—and I shouldn't wonder if he could give a shrewd guess at the number of bullets fired."

"The serjeant's a wonderful man, Mr. Fishwick," observed Proddy, in admiration.

"You may say that, Mr. Proddy," returned the cook—"he *is* a wonderful man. I don't know such another. You'll see his room presently, and you'll find it a perfect museum."

"He told me he had something to shew me," said Proddy.

"And he told you the truth," rejoined Fishwick. "The duke is uncommonly partial to the serjeant, and chooses to have him constantly near him, and having perfect confidence in him, employs him on any business where secrecy is required. The serjeant, on his part, shews his attachment to his noble master in a curious way. He wont let any one clean his boots but himself."

"Just like me!" cried Proddy. "I wouldn't let any one clean the queen's carriage but myself. The serjeant's a man after my own heart."

"The serjeant is too fond of drumming to please me," remarked Mrs. Tipping, who, being a lady's maid, was somewhat of a fine lady herself. "Rat-a-tat-atat-atat,—rat-a-tat-atat-atat! he's at it from mornin' to night, so that it's a mercy the drums of

one's ears ain't split with the noise. I wonder my lady stands it. I'm sure I wouldn't, if I were a duchess."

"The duchess is a soldier's wife, Mrs. Tipping," said the cook, in a tone of slight rebuke; "and our noble master is indulgent to his faithful follower, and humours his whims. The serjeant, you must know, Mr. Proddy, first served as a drummer, and though he has risen as you see, he still loves his old occupation."

"Quite nat'ral, Mr. Fishwick," replied Proddy; "an old coachman always likes the smack of the whip."

"Well, my dear, if you object to the serjeant's drumming," remarked Mrs. Plumpton to Mrs. Tipping, "I'm sure you can't find fault with his singing. He's as melodious as a nightingale."

"He croaks like a raven, in my opinion,"

rejoined pretty Mrs. Tipping; "but we can easily understand why *you* find his singing so sweet, Mrs. Plumpton."

"And why, pray, I should like to know, Mrs. Saucebox?" cried the housekeeper, angrily.

"Fie, ladies, fie!" interposed Fishwick—"quarrelling so early in the day. Mr. Proddy will have a pretty idea of your tempers."

"I should be ashamed to quarrel with a creature like Tipping," cried Mrs. Plumpton; "but if it must be told, there was a time when she liked both the serjeant's drumming and singing."

"I wont degrade myself by answering a spiteful old thing like Plumpton," replied Mrs. Tipping, "but I cast her vile insinuations in her teeth. Like his drumming and singing, forsooth! Marry, come up!

she'll try to persuade you I like the serjeant himself next."

"So you do," retorted Mrs. Plumpton; "so you do! And you're jealous of his attentions to me, though I'm sure I give him no encouragement. And that's why you abuse him so."

"Ladies, ladies, I must again call you to order," cried Fishwick, "It's a pity that a question of harmony, like the present, should lead to discord—ha! ha! But here's the toast, Mr. Proddy. If you wish to see the serjeant, I'll shew you the way to his room."

Plunging the toast into the ale, and swallowing a huge mouthful or two, Mr. Proddy left the rest to soak, and resuming his pipe, which he had replenished during the preceding discourse, followed his conductor down a passage, leading apparently to the

other side of the house. They had not proceeded far, when their ears were saluted by the loud rattan of a drum.

"That's the serjeant," cried Fishwick, with a laugh; "you'll have no difficulty in finding him now."

Whereupon he retraced his steps, while the other proceeded in the direction of the sound, which grew louder and louder each moment, until, as he reached a small chamber whence it issued, he was well-nigh stunned.

Rat-a-tat-atat-a-r-r-r-r-a-r-a—Rat-a-tat-atat-a-r-r-r-r-a-r-a!

Sergeant Scales cleaning the Duke of Marlborough's boots

CHAPTER VI.

INTRODUCES SERJEANT SCALES, AND SHEWS HOW THE DUKE OF MARLBOROUGH'S BOOTS WERE CLEANED.

"WHAT a devil of a din," thought Proddy. "I begin to think Mrs. Tipping was right. The serjeant is *raythe*r too fond of drumming. I've come at an unlucky moment. But it can't last for ever."

It lasted longer than he expected though, and became so intolerably loud towards the close, that he wondered whether he should ever hear distinctly afterwards. The door being partially open, gave to view a sparely-

made but athletic-looking man, who must have been more than six feet high when he stood erect, seated on a joint stool, with a large drum between his legs, which he was beating in the furious manner above described. Little flesh, but a vast deal of muscle, had Serjeant Scales; his hands were large and bony, so were his feet, so was his face, and his whole frame seemed knotted and compact, and built for a stout resistance against attacks of all kinds, whether from without or within. That he must have undergone much wear and tear was evident; but the freshness of his complexion, which was streaked with red, like an apple, bore testimony that neither the fatigues of a soldier's life, nor the addiction to good liquor, which was laid to his charge, had impaired his constitution. His nose was of unusual magnitude, and it was probably owing to its

prominence that he had received the severe cut across it, which had so nearly robbed him of this remarkable feature. Nothing, indeed, but the skill of the surgeon of the regiment saved him from complete disfigurement, for his nose had actually been sliced off, and was only found and re-applied to the face some little time after its excision.* The restoration, however, was perfect; and though the point of junction to the parent stock could certainly be discovered, the nose was as firmly fixed, as ornamental, and as useful to all intents and purposes as ever. The serjeant had a pair of kindly grey eyes, shaded by grizzled brows; his forehead was bald and scarred in several places, while a

* Some curious cases, in which severed noses have been successfully restored, are mentioned in Mr. PETTIGREW's recent very amusing treatise on "*Medical Superstitions.*"

black patch just above the left temple shewed where a recent wound had been received. There was an air of military cleanliness about him. His face was shaved with scrupulous nicety, the scanty locks that graced the sides of his head were carefully powdered, and a tolerably thick pig-tail hung down his shoulders. A regimental waistcoat of blue cloth, fitting tight to the shape, and braided with white at the pockets and button-holes; tight white gaiters, ascending above the knee, and fastened beneath it with a black strap; square-toed shoes; a leathern stock; and a little cap of the same material, constituted his attire.

At the further end of the room hung two prints, the one representing the victory of Ramilies, in which the prowess of the British troops was represented in a very lively manner, and the other being a plan of the

battle of Blenheim. Underneath was a map of the Netherlands, and a plan of the camp and entrenchments on the Schellenberg. Between these plans, from a peg, hung the serjeant's regimental coat, carefully brushed, and with the buttons polished as bright as silver, together with his three-cornered hat. On the left stood a large black military chest, with the owner's name inscribed upon it. Above it was a print of the recent royal visit of thanksgiving to Saint Paul's. Opposite was a portrait of the Duke of Marlborough on horseback, enveloped in clouds of smoke, and calling to his men to charge. Near the duke was a broken sword, to which, doubtless, some history was attached; and beneath the sword hung a pair of buff-coloured, and seemingly blood-stained gloves, and a meerschaum. There were also two other caricatures, purporting to be

portraits of Marshals Villars and Tallard, placed, intentionally no doubt, immediately under the picture of their great conqueror. From the centre of the roof hung, suspended by a stout cord, a twenty-pound-weight piece of shot. On a small deal table, on the right, stood a pair of jack-boots, (WHOSE, Mr. Proddy could easily divine,) a pot of blacking, a box of brushes, a pair of spurs, a knife, and some other trifling matters. On the floor lay a piece of music recently composed, and entitled, "A new health to the Duke of Marlborough, in three glasses," a map of Flanders, and a roll of popular ballads.

Having finished his reveillée, very much, as it appeared, to his own satisfaction, the serjeant got up, and putting the drum aside, proceeded to tie an apron round his waist. After which, he took up a boot and began

to brush it, clearing up his pipes at the same time for the following stave:—

MARLBROOK TO THE WARS IS COMING.

MARLBROOK to the wars is coming!
I fancy I hear his drumming;
'Twill put an end to the mumming
Of our priest-ridden Monarque!
For the moment he enters Flanders,
He'll scare all our brave commanders,
They'll fly like so many ganders,
Disturb'd by a mastiff's bark.

He comes;—and at SCHELLENBERG licks 'em,
At BLENHEIM next, how he kicks 'em,
And on RAMILIES' plain how he sticks 'em
With bay'net to the ground!
For, says he, "Those saucy Mounseers,
I'll thoroughly—thoroughly trounce, sirs,
As long as there's an ounce, sirs,
Of powder to be found.

Now he's gone home so jolly,
And we're left melancholy,
Lamenting of our folly
That such a part we took.

For bitterly has he drubb'd us,
And cruelly has he snubb'd us,
And against the grain has rubb'd us,
This terrible Turk, MARLBROOK.

We hope he will never come back, sirs,
Our generals to attack, sirs,
And thrash them all in a crack, sirs,
As he has done before.
But in case QUEEN ANNE should send him,
We trust she'll kindly lend him
Some Tories* to attend him,
Then he'll return no more!

At the close of the ditty, Mr. Proddy walked into the room.

"Serjeant Scales, your most obedient," he said; "man of my word, you see."

"So I perceive," rejoined the serjeant; "glad to see you. How are you, comrade? Excuse me. Can't shake hands. Busy."

* It will be remembered that the Tories of those days were pretty nearly the Whigs of ours; and that they were violently opposed to Marlborough, and the war with France.

"Don't mind me," replied Proddy; "*I'm* never interrupted. Go on."

"I like the sentiment," rejoined the serjeant. "Take a seat. This stool."

"Thank'ee, no," replied Proddy. "I prefer sitting here." And setting the mug on the chest, he clambered up beside it with some difficulty. When he was comfortably settled, the serjeant remarked—

"You know what I hold in my hand, comrade?"

The coachman nodded, significantly.

"Yes, it's HIS boot, comrade—HIS boot!" cried the serjeant, emphatically. "I should like to see any man clean this boot but me."

"So I always say, when I wash down the royal carriage," observed Mr. Proddy. "'I should like to see any man clean this carriage but me.' That's my observation."

"But the duke is the duke," cried the serjeant, not quite pleased with the remark.

"And the queen is the queen," retorted Proddy.

"But which is the greater?" demanded Scales, with some asperity. "Which is the greater, I ask?"

"Why the queen, to be sure," replied Proddy.

"No such thing," rejoined the serjeant. "The duke is the greater. Where 'ud the queen be without him? Doesn't he win all her battles for her?—doesn't he keep her on her throne?—doesn't he direct everything? Zounds, comrade, doesn't he govern the kingdom?"

"Not that I'm aware of," replied Proddy, opening his round eyes to their widest extent; "but they say the duchess does."

"Proddy, you're a Tory," said the serjeant, disdainfully.

"Dash my wig, if I am," replied Proddy; "but though I like the duke, I must stick up for my royal missis."

"Well, you're right," returned the serjeant, after a pause; "and I like you the better for it. Give us your hand, my boy. And now look at this boot, Proddy. Observe it well. Do you see anything extraordinary about it?"

"About the heel, or the toe?" asked the coachman.

"You're devoid of soul to make such a reply, Proddy," said the serjeant. "This is a remarkable boot—a very remarkable boot—an historical boot, as I may say. It was worn by the Duke of Marlborough at the battle of Ramilies."

"Odsbodikins! you don't say so," exclaimed the coachman.

"Yes, I do," replied Scales; "and I could

say a great deal more about it, if I chose. But that one fact's enough."

"I suppose he wore t'other boot at the battle o' Blenheim," remarked the coachman, innocently.

"Nonsense!" cried the serjeant, angrily. And brushing away at the boot with great vigour, to hide his vexation, he once more lifted up his voice in song:—

KING FROG AND QUEEN CRANE.

Old King Frog, he swore begar!
  Croakledom cree!—croakledom croo!
That he with Queen Crane would go to war,
  Blusterem boo!—thrusterem through!
With that, he summon'd his fiercest Frogs,
With great cock'd hats, and with queues like logs,
And says he, "Thrash these Cranes, you ugly dogs!
  Sing, Ventre-saint-gris!—Parbleu!"

To fight they went; but alack! full soon,
  Croakledom cree!—croakledom croo!
Messieurs the Frogs they changed their tune,
  Of blusterem boo!—thrusterem through!

For Queen Crane had a leader stout and strong,
With a bill like a fire-spit, six yards long,
And the Froggies he gobbled up all day long,
With their "Ventre-saint-gris!—Parbleu!"

"Bravo, serjeant," exclaimed Proddy. "You sing as well as you drum. The drum's a warlike instrument, serjeant."

"I believe you," replied Scales, with sudden animation, "the most warlike instrument as is, except the fife. But I prefer the drum. You should hear me beat the different calls, comrade."

"How many calls may there be, serjeant?" asked Proddy.

"I never counted 'em," replied Scales; "but let me see—there's the morning call, or reveillée—one; the assembly call, for the troops to fall in—two; foot-march—three; and there used to be another beat, called the long-march, for the men to club their

fire-locks—that may count as four; then there's the grenadier's march — five; the retreat——"

"You never beat that, I'm sure, serjeant," interposed Proddy.

"Often," replied Scales; "though not in the way you imagine. The retreat is beaten at sunset, or gun-fire, when the pickets are formed—that makes six; the tattoo—seven; the call to arms—the church call—the pioneer's call—the serjeant's call—the drummer's call — the preparative, which gives the signal to the men to get ready for firing —the chamade, which means that a parley is desired—and the rogue's march, which is beaten when a soldier is drummed out of the regiment. In all, fifteen."

"You amaze me!" said Proddy. "I should as soon ha' thought o' there bein' fifteen different ways of cracking a whip."

"So there are, no doubt, to him who can find 'em out," observed Scales, somewhat contemptuously. And having polished the boot to his entire satisfaction, he put it carefully down on the floor, and took up the other.

"I say, serjeant," cried Proddy, "do you know what you're doin'? You'll spoil that map."

"Never mind if I do, comrade," replied Scales, smiling. "It's not by accident that map of Flanders lies there. And it's not by accident that the Duke of Marlborough's boot is set upon it."

"I take," cried Proddy. "You mean to shew that the duke has planted his foot on Flanders, eh?"

"Exactly," replied the serjeant. "You've hit the mark as neatly as I did the Bavarian trooper, at the battle of Schellenberg, when

he was in the act of levelling a pistol at the duke's head. That boot precisely covers Bruges, Ghent, Antwerp, Oudenarde, Mechlin, and Brussels; all which cities his grace has lately subjected. I never do anything without a meaning, comrade. Look at those spurs," he added, pausing in his work, and pointing to them with the brush. "You might think it accident that they're leaning against the picters of them two French generals. But it's not. Guess why I put 'em there?"

"To shew how woundily the duke goads em, I s'pose," replied Proddy.

"Right," rejoined the serjeant; "you take me exactly, comrade. "It's a pleasure to talk to a man of your discernment. Those two queer-looking chaps have given us a world o' trouble. Both are brave men,—for we mustn't disparage an enemy,

—but the bravest of the two, as well as the best general, is old Tallard. A well-fought battle was that of Blenheim,—and well do I remember the day! I needn't tell you it was the glorious Thirteenth of August, 1704. Many and many a boon and brave companion did I leave on that bloody field. The duke himself had a narrow escape, as you shall hear. About two o'clock in the morning, our camp between Erlingshofen and Kessel-Ostheim was broken up, and the troops were put in motion; the right wing of the army being commanded by Prince Eugene, and the left by the Duke of Marlborough. We marched forward in silence, and the morning being hazy, the enemy did not suspect our approach. As we drew near, the two generals rode forward with a strong escort to reconnoitre; and from this rising ground,"—pointing to

the plan,—"near Wolperstetten, they descried the whole of the hostile camp. The duke then, after some consideration, laid out his plan of battle. By this time, the mist having cleared off, our propinquity was discovered, and the alarm being instantly given, preparations were made by Tallard and the Elector of Bavaria for the approaching strife. I shan't go through all our preparations, or the dispositions of the enemy, because you mightn't care to hear about 'em, or wouldn't understand 'em if you did, but shall pass to the event in question. It having been agreed between the two generals that the battle should begin on both wings at the same moment, Prince Eugene rode off, and the duke, while awaiting his signal, ordered service to be performed at the head of each regiment. This done, he appointed posts for the

wounded, and gave special instructions to the surgeons; after which, he mounted his horse, and riding along the lines, seemed well pleased to find us all in such good heart, and so eager to begin. 'You shan't have to wait long, my lads,' he said. Scarcely were the words uttered, when a ball from one of the batteries struck the ground close beside him, and covered him from head to foot with dust. We all thought he was hit, and a cry was raised, but he shook the dust from his shoulders, raised his hat, and rode on as if nothing had happened."

"Just what I should have done under similar circumstances," observed Proddy. "Pray, serjeant, whose sword may that have been?" he added, glancing at the broken weapon hanging against the wall.

"That sword belonged to a brave man,

comrade — a very brave man," replied Scales; "no less a person than General Rowe, who was killed on the memorable day I've just mentioned. I was near him when he fell. The brigade under his command had to cross the Nebel, the little river you see here," again referring to the plan, "under so dreadful a discharge of grape, that the clear water was turned to blood. But not a shot was allowed to be fired in return. On gaining the opposite bank, General Rowe drew his sword, and, in the teeth of the enemy's guns, with the balls whistling about his ears like hail, advanced to the enclosures, and striking his blade against the pallisades, gave the word to fire. At the same moment, a bullet pierced his breast; but, though mortally wounded, he waved his broken blade above his head, for he had shivered it against

the wood, and called to his men to advance. The sword that fell from his grasp I picked up and preserved. Poor fellow! if he had died later in the day I should have grieved for him less. As it was, his last moments were cheered by the certainty of victory."

"A great consolation," observed Proddy. "I should like to die in harness myself. But I observe a pair of gloves there. They've a history, I dare say?"

"They have," replied Scales. "The dark stains you see upon them are blood—*my* blood, comrade. Those gloves were once the property of a Bavarian officer, whom I captured at the battle of Schellenberg. He had fled towards the Danube, but I overtook him in a wood, captured him after a struggle, and was returning with my prisoner, when two of his own men came up.

Scared as they were, they saw how matters stood, and halted. The officer instantly broke from me, though he had yielded—rescue or no rescue,—and all three prepared to attack me. Before they could touch me, however, I shot one of them, and having my bayonet fixed, contrived to keep off the other two; and not merely keep 'em off, but to give 'em some awkward pokes into the bargain. At last, the second man fell, and the officer alone was left. He was severely wounded, but making a desperate blow at me, he cut through my cap, and brought down the blood over my face like rain, and then closing with me, seized me by the throat with both hands. Millions of sparkles danced in my eyes, and I could feel my tongue coming out between my teeth. But just when I believed all was over, his grasp relaxed, I shook him off,

and he fell to the ground—stark dead! I kept his gloves, stained as you see 'em, in memory of the event."

"You'd a narrow escape, serjeant," observed Proddy; "that's a death I don't desire. It seems too like hangin'."

"Perhaps you would prefer to die like poor Colonel Bingfield, whose head was carried off by that cannon-ball, at the battle of Ramilies?" rejoined Scales.

"No, I shouldn't," replied Proddy, looking up with astonishment, mixed with alarm, at the huge piece of shot hanging above his head. "Has that cannon-ball actually taken off a man's head?"

"As clean as an axe could do it," returned Scales.

"Lor!" exclaimed Proddy, involuntarily putting his hand to his neck, and wondering how he should feel without his head,

"If it wouldn't be tirin' you, serjeant, I should like to hear about *that*."

"You must know, then," replied Scales, "that during the heat of the conflict, the Duke of Marlborough, seeing some of the cavalry in disorder, dashed amongst them, to encourage them by his presence; but, being recognised by the French dragoons, with whom they were engaged, he was surrounded, and exposed to the greatest danger. Providence, however, had decreed that he was not to be taken, and extricating himself from them, he leaped a wide ditch; but in so doing, his horse fell, and he was hurled to the ground. In an instant, another horse was offered him by his aide-de-camp, Captain Molesworth, while Colonel Bingfield, his equerry, held the stirrup. As the duke sprung to the saddle, he uttered a cry of horror. The colonel

fell back, *headless!*—while he himself was bespattered with blood and brains. This cannon-ball, which I afterwards dug out of the bank, and brought away, had acted the part of the poor colonel's executioner."

"Did you find the poor colonel's head?" inquired Proddy, who had turned extremely pale during the latter relation.

"No," replied Scales, "it was blown, as we say, to smash."

"Lord bless us, how shockin'!" ejaculated Proddy, recruiting himself by a prolonged pull at the mug.

"By way of changing the subject, I'll sing you a song which I myself composed on these boots," said the serjeant. And he forthwith commenced the following ditty, accompanying the chorus with a quick and appropriate movement of the brush:

THE BOOTS OF MARLBROOK.

Four marshals of France vow'd their monarch to guard,
Bragging BOUFFLERS, vain VILLARS, VILLEROY, and TALLARD;
These four gasconaders in jest undertook
To pull off the boots of the mighty MARLBROOK.
Brush—brush away!

The field was first taken by BOUFFLERS and VILLARS,
But though they were the chaffers, yet we were the millers;
BONN, LIMBURGH, and HUY, soon our general took,—
'Twas not easy to pull off the boots of MARLBROOK.
Brush—brush away!

TALLARD next essayed with BAVARIA's Elector,
But the latter turn'd out an indifferent protector;
For he SCHELLENBERG lost, while at BLENHEIM both shook
In their shoes, at the sight of the boots of MARLBROOK.
Brush—brush away!

To RAMILIES next came the vaunting VILLEROY,
In his own esteem equal to Hector of Troy;
But he found like the rest that his man he mistook—
And fled at the sight of the boots of MARLBROOK.
Brush—brush away!

Then here's to the boots made of stout English leather,
Well soled, and well heel'd, and right well put together!
He deserves not the name of a Briton, who'd brook
A word 'gainst the fame of the boots of MARLBROOK.
Brush—brush away!

Of Gallia the dread, and of Europe the wonder,
These boots, like their master, will never knock under;
We'll bequeath 'em our sons, and our sons' sons shall look
With pride and delight on the boots of MARLBROOK.
Brush—brush away!

"Brush—brush away!" chorused Proddy, breaking his pipe in his enthusiasm.

"Hang it!" cried the serjeant, "I don't know how it is, but the thought o' the duke's goodness always brings the water to my eyes. I wish you could see him visitin' the wounded, as I've so often seen him. He's just as considerate to the enemy as to his own men. Or, if you could meet him making the rounds of the camp at night. He's as free and easy, and as like——"

At this moment, a tall figure appeared at the door. Proddy looked round in dismay, and instantly slipped off the chest.

"It's the victor of Ramilies himself," whispered Scales. "Stand at ease, comrade."

"I *am* standin' as easy as I can," replied Proddy.

"Don't disturb yourself," said the duke, good-naturedly. "I've a little commission for you, serjeant."

"Always ready to obey orders, general," replied Scales, standing bolt upright, and saluting.

"Who is this person?" asked Marlborough, regarding Proddy, who was imitating the serjeant as well as he could. "I seem to know him."

"The queen's coachman, Mr. Proddy, your grace," replied Scales.

"I thought I recollected the face. Her majesty has a good servant in you, no doubt, Mr. Proddy?" observed the duke.

"None better, your grace, though I say it, who shouldn't," rejoined Proddy.

"You know the Marquis de Guiscard, serjeant?" said the duke, turning to him.

"Perfectly, general."

"And are acquainted with his residence?" pursued Marlborough.

"No. 29, Pall Mall."

"Good," returned the duke. "Watch him, and let me know where he goes to-day."

"Any more commands, general?"

The duke replied in the negative.

"Your grace is probably aware that the marquis attempted to carry off Miss Hill, in Saint James's-street, yesterday?" observed Proddy.

"Some such report reached me, certainly," replied the duke, carelessly; "but I believe it to be a mistake."

"It was no mistake, beggin' your grace's pardon," replied Proddy. "I heard all partic'lars from parties who saw what happened. A country parson, Mr. Hyde, together with his wife and daughter, are lodgin' in the house of a gentleman of my

acquaintance, Mr. Greg, and they told me what occurred."

"That Greg is a clerk with Mr. Secretary Harley—ha?" cried the duke, quickly.

"He is, your grace," replied Proddy.

"Do you see much of him?" asked Marlborough.

At times, your grace. He comes to question me as to what happens in the palace. And that's what has brought about our acquaintance. He's always very curious to know if her majesty speaks of the Pretender."

"Well, and what can you tell him?" asked the duke, with apparent indifference.

"Little or nothin', your grace," replied Proddy. "Now and then a word may reach me,—but that's all."

"You were saying last night, that you

had promised to deliver a letter from Mr. Greg to her majesty," observed Scales.

"To her majesty!" exclaimed the duke, bending his brows. "Does he dare——"

"He has often entreated me to undertake the task for him," stammered Proddy; "and at last I consented."

"Have you got the letter?" asked the duke.

"Y—e—e—s," rejoined the coachman.

"Give it me," cried Marlborough.

"Shall I search him, general?" asked Scales.

"No, it ain't necessary, serjeant," replied Proddy, producing a letter from the crown of his cap, and delivering it to the duke.

"You may not be aware of the risk you have run," observed the duke, sternly. "This Greg is suspected of being an agent of the Pretender's, and is believed to be in

communication with M. Chamillard, the French secretary of state, for the purpose of revealing the secrets of our cabinet. If this letter had been delivered, you would probably have been hanged."

"Spare me, your grace, spare me!" cried Proddy, trembling from head to foot. "It was done in ignorance—in pure ignorance. The serjeant knows I hate the Pretender and popery as I abominate Satan, and all his works, and am ready to fight to the last gasp for the Protestant secession."

"Succession, you mean, Proddy," whispered Scales.

"No harm shall befal you if you are silent," said Marlborough.

"I'll be as silent as the grave," replied Proddy.

"Do nothing to alarm Greg," pursued the duke, "for I suspect he is not the only per-

son engaged in this treasonable design, and it is necessary to secure all the guilty parties. You may tell him with a safe conscience, that his letter shall be delivered to the queen, for I myself will place it in her hands."

"I will do whatever your grace commands me," said the coachman, recovering a little from his terror.

"Enough," replied the duke. "I will not fail to take your devotion into account. But I must remind you, that the slightest indiscretion will be fatal. Keep strict guard over your tongue. You say Greg has friends staying with him—a country parson and his wife. They must be watched."

"Nay, your grace, I could take my Bible oath they're no traitors," replied Proddy.

"You are easily imposed upon, I fear, my good man," said the duke; "but we shall see. Serjeant, come to me at two,

and report what you have seen of the marquis."

"Odsbobs! now I think of it, the marquis is known to Greg," cried Proddy. "I've seen 'em together, and one Monsieur Claude Baud, the Count de Briançon's secretary."

"Indeed," exclaimed the duke, "the plot thickens! Serjeant, go with the coachman in the evening, and try what you can make of Greg. You understand what to do in the other matter. Mr. Proddy, I must again impress upon you the absolute necessity of caution."

So saying, he quitted the room.

"Gracious me!" exclaimed Proddy, sinking upon the stool. "What a fright I've been in, to be sure. A treasonable correspondence with the Pretender! A hangin, affair. And poor innocent I to be lugged into it without my knowledge. Oh lor! oh lor!"

"Hush!" exclaimed the serjeant. "Recollect his grace's caution. Not a word of what you've heard to a living soul. Don't breathe it even to yourself, for you're not to be trusted. But I must now call Mr. Timperley, his grace's valet, and send up his boots."

CHAPTER VII.

OF THE MORTAL DEFIANCE OFFERED TO SERJEANT SCALES BY MONSIEUR HIPPOLYTE BIMBELOT.

THE boots being delivered, the serjeant next put on his hat and coat, and, accompanied by Proddy, sallied forth to Pall Mall, where, after agreeing to meet in the evening to visit Greg, pursuant to the orders they had received, the companions separated—the one betaking himself to the palace, and the other directing his steps towards No. 29.

Scales was soon there, and by good luck, finding Monsieur Hippolyte Bimbelot, the

marquis's valet, with whom he had some acquaintance, at the door, he entered into conversation with him, and made himself so amusing, that he was speedily invited into the house. Monsieur Bimbelot had not breakfasted; and though the serjeant had consumed a couple of pounds of rump-steaks some two hours before, he was easily prevailed upon to take his place at table, and in the exhibition of his masticatory powers far outdid his entertainer. The drumming, singing, and boot-cleaning had given him an appetite. As to Monsieur Bimbelot, he was far too fine a gentleman to eat much. The wing of a chicken, the crumby part of a French roll, and a pint of Bourdeaux, contented him, while the serjeant carved away at the ham, sliced the loaf, explored the unctuous recesses of a Strasbourg pie, cracked the domes of a

couple of eggs à la coq,—but shook his head at the claret.

In vain Monsieur Bimbelot assured him that it was of an excellent vintage, and that his master had imported it himself;—the serjeant replied, somewhat gruffly, that he never drunk such sour French stuff, though he admitted that his anti-gallican prejudices did not extend to an equal dislike of the brandy of that country. At last, his views were completely met by a bottle of Canary, which he lauded to the skies as a fine corroborative and strengthener of the stomach.

Like most of the fashionable valets of the period, Monsieur Bimbelot modelled himself upon his master. Like his master, therefore, he was a rake, a gamester, a beau, and, in a small way, an intriguant in politics. He wrote love-verses, execrable enough, to be sure, halting in their feet, slightly erring in grammatical construc-

tion, and containing, like his discourse, a comical admixture of French and English; affected to be a wit; lampooned his companions; and retailed all the scandal of Saint James's. He dressed gaily, that is, he wore his master's cast-off clothes; was nice in his perfumes; took Spanish snuff; covered his face with patches; played ombre and picquet; and was great in the galleries of the theatres. Monsieur Bimbelot was a little man, but he possessed a tolerably good figure, of which he was inordinately vain; his features resembled those of a baboon, with an enormous mouth, frightful projecting teeth, a clubbed nose, and a complexion like brick-dust. He used, indeed, to observe of himself, when standing before the glass to adjust his cravat, to put on a patch, or merely to contemplate his figure, "Pas beau, mais diablement gentil!"

The serjeant was too much engrossed by

the viands before him to talk, but he made an excellent listener, and Monsieur Bimbelot rattled away about the theatres, the coffee-houses, the taverns, and the gaming-tables, and spoke with the greatest familiarity as well of actresses and orange-women, as of ladies of the first rank and fashion. He was especially eloquent on the subject of the play-houses; and spoke critically of the merits of Mrs. Bracegirdle and Mrs. Oldfield—those rival queens—deciding in favour of the former, though he confessed she was a little on the decline—Mrs. Barry, Betterton, Booth, Wilks, Cibber, Verbruggen, and other stars of the then theatrical hemisphere.

"You've seen Madame Bracegirdle at de Haymarket, sans doute, sergent?" he said. "You shake your head. Den let me recommend you to lose no time in doing so.

Ma foi! qu'elle est charmante, delicieuse, ravissante. She play Stifania, in 'Rule a Wife and Have a Wife,' to-night, and Mrs. Barry, Margarita. Don't fail to go. Dere's Weeks, too, in de 'Copper Capitaine.' Je vous donne ma parole d'honneur que vous serez enchanté. Apropos, sergent, your duke should see dat comedy, for dey say it is all 'rule a wife' at Marlbrook House."

"No jesting about the duke, Bamby," said Scales, sternly; "I don't allow it."

"Pardon, mon cher sergent," cried Bimbelot. "I have de highest possible respect for Lady Marlbrook. C'est une dame magnifique, superbe comme une reine, et adorable comme une ange. If ever I commit de folly of marriage, I should wish to be govern by my wife, for I make de observation dat men are alvays happy under vat you call de petticoat government. Est ce que vous

sçavez le raison de cela, mon brave? Ce n'est pas clair, mais c'est indubitable."

"If you wish me to digest my breakfast, you wont talk so much French to me, Bamby," said Scales. "You can speak English well enough, if you like."

"Ver good in you to say so, sergent," replied the valet; "but I talk so mush to my master, dat I quite lose my English."

"I say, Bamby, what sort of master do you find the marquis?" asked Scales.

"Oh, ver good!" replied the valet, "suit me exactly, or I'd dissharshe him. Sacre-bleu! c'est un excellent maitre; pas trop riche; mais follement prodigue, et excessivement genereux quand il gagne, ce que fait la fortune d'un valet. Non, sergent, I have no reason to be dissatisfy wid de marquis. Shall I tell you a secret? Il va marier."

"Curse that lingo!" cried the serjeant. "Talk English, can't you! Who's he going to marry?"

"Jure moi que vous tiendrez le secret, sergent, si je vous le dis," said Bimbelot, mysteriously.

"Swords and bayonets! I shall lose all patience," cried Scales. "Is the lady rich?"

"Mais non," answered Bimbelot.

"Young?"

"Pas trop—une peu avancée."

"Handsome?"

"Mais non—selon mon gout."

"Neither young, rich, nor handsome," cried Scales. "Then what the devil does he marry her for?"

"Ay, dere it is, sergent," returned Bimbelot. "Il a un motif—un très bon motif. Je vous conjure d'être secret. C'est la

favorite de la reine—la nouvelle favorite, sergent. Qu'en pensez vous de cela?"

"Think of it?" cried Scales—"I don't know what to think of it! What between your gibberish and the news, I'm fairly bewildered."

"You'll see some shanges, by by, dat vill stonish your veak nerves, sergent," rejoined Bimbelot. "On my master's return from de ball at de palace, last night, he tell me dat Mademoiselle Hill has accept him, and order me to call him at eleven—instead of twelve, his usual hour—dis morning, as he have to attend Mr. Harley, the lady's cousin, pour arranger les fiançailles."

"Arrange the devil!" cried the serjeant, angrily. "I don't believe a word of it."

"Comment donc—est ce que vous me doutez, sergent?" cried the valet, angrily.

"Am I to understand dat my veracity is question, sare?"

"I don't doubt you, Bamby," replied Scales, "but I do your master. Miss Hill will never marry a cursed Frenchman."

"Ah, sacré nom! c'est trop fort," cried the valet, starting up, and gesticulating with fury. "I am a Frenchman, sare, as vell as my master, and my master's honour is dear to me as my own. Il faut que le sang coule—you shall lend me satisfaction for dis insult, sergent."

"Whenever you please, Bamby," replied Scales, coolly.

"Pas Bamby—Bimbelot, sare—*Monsieur* Bimbelot!" rejoined the valet, slapping his breast with dignity. "Nous battrons donc demain matin au point du jour, dans Hyde Park, avec des epées?"

"Good, Bamby," replied the imperturbable serjeant.

"Nous aurons des temoins," pursued Bimbelot. "I sall bring a second wid me. You had better arrange your worldly fair, sergent, for I sall certainly cut your troat unless you shoose to apologize."

"I must take my chance of that, Bamby," rejoined Scales; "but I am not in the habit of eating my words, whatever your countrymen may be. But with your permission, now that the meeting is arranged, I'll finish the bottle."

"Ah, oui, je vous prie," replied Bimbelot, instantly resuming his former politeness. "Vous trouvez ce vin bon, sergent?"

"Excellent!" replied Scales. "Your health, Bamby."

"Mille remercimens," cried the valet. "May you live a tousand year—dat is, if I don't keell you to-morrow."

The serjeant acknowledged the compli-

ment, and emptying the bottle into a tumbler, drained it at a draught. He then rose to depart.

"Je vous prierais de rester, et de prendre une autre bouteille," said Bimbelot, "mais j'ai entendu la sonnette de mon maitre. Laissez moi vous conduire à la porte. Adieu, mon sergent. A demain."

"Count on me, Bamby," replied Scales. And with ceremonious bows on either side, the serjeant took his departure.

Before going home, however, he wished to satisfy himself that the intelligence he had picked up was correct, and accordingly, he loitered about Pall Mall for nearly an hour, with his eye on the door of No. 29, until, at a little before twelve, the marquis came forth, and proceeded towards Saint James's Square.

Scales followed him at a cautious distance,

saw him enter a house on the north side of the square, which he knew to be Harley's residence, and, convinced from this that he had not been deceived, he returned to Marlborough House.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SECRETARY'S LEVEE.

THE Marquis de Guiscard, though he expected to be instantly admitted, was ushered into an ante-room, where several persons were seated, awaiting, like himself, an audience of the secretary.

Among them were three individuals, with whose faces he was familiar, having noticed them among the crowd of spectators in Saint James's Street, on the morning of

the drawing-room, just before his own unsuccessful attempt to obtain an interview with Abigail Hill. These were Parson Hyde, his wife and daughter. Angelica's freshness and beauty had attracted Guiscard's attention when he first beheld her, but he was too much occupied by his project then to bestow more than a thought upon her; but now that he beheld her under different circumstances, he wondered he had not been more struck by her.

Angelica was plainly and modestly, yet not unbecomingly attired in a flat low-crowned bonnet, with large brims, which sat on the top of her head, and which, while it shaded her face, displayed very charmingly her luxuriant auburn hair, gathered in a cluster of ringlets behind. A scarlet silk petticoat, seen through a white calico dress, which was tucked up at the

side; boddice of the same colour as the petticoat; a white muslin apron; long white silk mittens, that came up nearly to the elbow, and high-heeled shoes, which suited her little feet to perfection, formed the sum of her dress. Her mother, who, it has before been mentioned, had not lost her comeliness, wore a black silk gown, a little faded, a furbelowed scarf, and ruffles, a spotted hood, and laced clogs.

Parson Hyde was conversing with a brother divine, whose rank in the church was higher than his own, as was evident from his attire, as well as from the doctor's hat which he held upon his knee. The features of the latter were handsome and prepossessing, his complexion sanguine, and his figure portly and commanding. He looked hard at Guiscard as he entered, returned the marquis's supercilious glance

with a frown, and then continued his conversation with Hyde, by whom he was addressed as Doctor Sacheverell.

Soon after this, and while the marquis was ogling the pretty Angelica, who flustered and blushed beneath his regards, looked this way and that, giggled to her mother, and crumpled up her apron between her fingers, in her agitation, the inner door was opened, and amid loud peals of laughter two persons came forth from it. An usher at the same time stepped up to Guiscard, and told him that Mr. Harley was disengaged; upon which the marquis, kissing his hand to Angelica, and courteously saluting the newcomers passed into the inner chamber.

The foremost of the persons who had just quitted the secretary, and considerably the younger of the two, was a very distinguished-looking man indeed. In stature he

was above the middle height, and his figure, though slight almost to effeminacy, was admirably proportioned. His features corresponded with his form, and were singularly beautiful and delicate, with a brow smooth and white as Parian marble, a slightly-rising but finely-chiselled nose, a curled and quivering lip, and a classically moulded chin. His eyes were large and dark, and as full of fire and softness as a woman's. An indescribable grace pervaded his slightest actions; his deportment was noble, though somewhat reckless; and but for a slight sneering air, and a certain libertine expression, his countenance would have been eminently pleasing. Indeed, it is but fair to say, that this expression was not habitual to it, and that there were occasions, and not unfrequent occasions either, when the sneer and the licentious glance were ex-

changed for quick and earnest sensibility, and for the loftiest and most impassioned look and demeanour. His age was under thirty, but such was the youthfulness of his aspect and figure, that it might have been guessed at three or four and twenty. He was dressed in the extremity of the fashion, and wore a light blue velvet coat with immense cuffs, richly embroidered with silver, amber-coloured stockings, crimson leather shoes, fastened with diamond buckles, and a diamond-hilted sword, with a long silken tassel dangling from the handle. His cravat was of point lace, and his hands were almost hidden by exaggerated ruffles of the same material. His hat was laced with silver, and feathered at the edges, and he wore his own brown hair in ringlets of some eighteen or twenty inches in length, tied behind with a long streaming red ribbon—a mode

which he himself had introduced. His handkerchief, which he carried in his hand, and occasionally applied to his lips as he spoke, was strongly perfumed, and he diffused an odour around him as he walked, as if he had just risen from a bath of flowers. Such was the statesman, the orator, the poet, the philosopher, the wit, the beau, the sybarite, the all-accomplished Henry Saint-John, her majesty's secretary-at-war.

His companion, whom he familiarly called Mat, and who was no other than the eminent poet, Matthew Prior, was a thin, rather hollow-cheeked, dark-complexioned man, the natural swarthiness of whose skin was deepened by the extreme blackness of his beard. His features were sharp and somewhat prominent, and his eyes dark, and yellowed in the ball by an attack of jaundice, but very brilliant and intelligent,

and glistening with fun and good-humour. His mouth had rather a caustic expression; but there was great jocularity and freedom in his manner, and the tones of his ringing and laughing voice fell pleasantly on the ear. His age was forty-two, but he looked fifty. He had lost his situation of under-secretary of state, but was one of the commissioners of trade, and sat in parliament as member for East Grinstead. He was plainly attired in a black riding-suit, with boots, wig, and hat to match, and carried a whip in his hand.

After chattering together for a few minutes, the pair were about to quit the room, when Saint-John chanced to notice Sacheverell, and instantly stopped.

"Ah, doctor," he cried, "I am delighted to see you. I have to congratulate you, and the church at the same time, on your

recent nomination to the rectorship of Saint Saviour's. To my shame be it spoken, I have not yet been to hear you.—What are you laughing at, Mat, you rogue?—But I am told that the sermons you have recently delivered there have been uncommonly powerful."

"Poppy-juice not more so,—they are undoubted soporifics," whispered Prior.

"Ah, Mr. Saint-John, you do me too much honour," said Sacheverell, bowing; "this praise from you is as gratifying as unexpected."

"It is richly merited, at all events, my dear doctor," replied Saint-John. "The effect of your sermons has already been felt in quarters where you would most desire it."

"Yes, because he has seasoned them strongly with politics," whispered Prior. "Personality is their chief merit."

Saint-John nudged his friend to be quiet, while Sacheverell bowed to the ground.

"The high church party owes you much, doctor," pursued Saint-John, "and I will venture to say it will not prove ungrateful."

"Let the Whigs bribe him with a bishopric, and he will preach up non-conformity or any other formity," whispered Prior.

"You attach more importance to my humble services than they merit, Mr. Saint-John," said Sacheverell; "but believing that I may do good, I shall persevere in the course I have begun. What I want in ability I shall make up in zeal, and I shall shrink from no menaces, as I would stoop to no corrupt rewards, though both, I do not hesitate to say, have been held out to me."

"What! can't you take a hint, Harry?"

whispered Prior. "Offer him Lincoln or Chester at once."

"I shall go on, I say, sir, undeterred," pursued Sacheverell; "and I make no doubt I shall in time rouse the lukewarm among the labourers at the vineyard to greater exertion. It is needed: for now, if it has ever been, the Church of England is in danger. You smile, Mr. Prior, but the subject is not one to be treated with levity. I repeat, the church is in danger. And it is a cry I will raise till it is echoed from every part of the country — till it shakes the present ministry from their places."

"'Sdeath! if he can do that he will richly deserve a mitre," whispered Prior. "I begin to think the fellow may prove useful. He is not deficient in energy."

"Excellent, doctor — excellent!" cried

Saint-John, trying to drown his friend's remarks by the loudness of his applause. "The church has a staunch champion in you."

"Too much toleration has been shewn its enemies, and its friends have too feebly supported it," cried Sacheverell, warming as he spoke. "I will wage war against the nonconformists — war to extermination, Mr. Saint-John."

"Rekindle the fires at Smithfield," whispered Prior.

"Any support we can render you, doctor, shall not be wanting, I assure you," said Saint-John, with affected ardour. "You had better explain your views fully to Mr. Harley."

"I have come with that intention, sir," replied Sacheverell, "and from the message I have received from the secretary, I have

no doubt he will co-operate with me. Mr. Harley is a true friend of the church."

"He is a true friend to himself," said Prior, half aside; "and his religion is self-advancement; but if he belongs to any sect, it is to that of the dissenters. However, to uphold the high church suits his present game, and he could not be addressed at a more favourable moment."

"What is that you are saying, Mr. Prior?" asked Sacheverell.

"I was merely observing, doctor, that Mr. Harley will be glad of an ally like yourself, and will support you through thick and thin," replied Prior.

"I am in right earnest in the cause, Mr. Prior," said Sacheverell, "and am prepared to undergo martyrdom for my opinions, if need be."

"We will hope you will only undergo

translation—to a better see, doctor," replied Prior, in a slightly sarcastic tone.

Saint-John hastened to interpose; but at this moment the inner door again opened, and Guiscard, with a radiant countenance, emerged from it. At the same time, the usher informed Sacheverell that he could have an audience of the secretary. The doctor took a ceremonious leave of Saint-John and Prior, and as soon as the door had closed upon him, the pair, wholly regardless of those around them, burst into a loud fit of laughter.

"Capital!" exclaimed Saint-John. "If the church is saved by Sacheverell, he will deserve canonizing, at the least."

"If the Whig ministry are expelled by him, he shall be made Archbishop of Canterbury, if I have any voice in the matter," rejoined Prior.

"You are laughing at Doctor Sacheverell, gentlemen," said Guiscard, approaching them; "but let me tell you he does not deserve your ridicule. He is not to be despised, as you will see. The fire is low, but he will blow it into flame."

"Like a pair of bellows," said Prior; "the implements are homely, but indispensable."

"Guiscard is right, I believe," said Saint-John, seriously. "By the bye, Marquis, I ought to congratulate you. You are likely, it seems, to marry the queen's new favourite. We shall have to solicit places from you next, eh?"

"And not in vain, Mr. Saint-John, if I have any to bestow," replied Guiscard, condescendingly. "There is no one who would lead an administration more brilliantly than yourself."

"Oh, marquis!"

"True, 'pon my honour."

"If I might venture to prefer a claim," said Prior, "that of a humble poet—"

"The only claim Mr. Prior need make," replied the marquis, "and in itself sufficient to ensure my best exertions in his behalf. But he has other, though not better claims, to which he may not attach sufficient importance, but which, nevertheless, must be taken into consideration; I mean, his talents as a statesman. For a man of Mr. Prior's ability, an *under*-secretaryship would be inadequate."

"Oh, marquis!" exclaimed the poet. But he added to himself, "'Pon my soul, he is a man of discernment, and deserves to succeed."

Remarking the mock attention paid to the marquis, Parson Hyde thought it in-

cumbent upon him to get up and make him a low bow.

"I had the honour of seeing you yesterday, when you stopped Miss Hill in Saint James's-street, marquis," he said. "I little imagined it would lead to this result. In fact, I thought the lady very much averse to your attentions."

"A little more experience of the world, reverend sir, would have taught you that a lady's opinion is as changeable as her dress," replied Guiscard.

"I am fully aware of that, marquis," replied Hyde, with a glance at his wife, "and I am glad the wind has shifted in your favour. Since you are likely to have so much to bestow, let me solicit some slight preferment for myself. I have a living in Essex, but it only brings me in forty pounds a-year."

"You may be sure of my interest, if only for the sake of your pretty daughter, my reverend friend," replied Guiscard, darting a tender look at Angelica.

"'Fore gad, a remarkably pretty girl," said Prior, whose attention was thus called to the parson's daughter. "Look at her, Harry. She's almost as beautiful as my Chloe."

"Troth is she," replied Saint-John. "You are come to ask preferment from Mr. Harley, eh, parson?"

"I am, sir," replied Hyde. "Understanding from my friend, Mr. Greg, that his chaplain has just left him, I have come to beg the place."

"Mr. Harley has a chaplain for every day in the week," said Prior, "and confers with each in turn. Thus, on Sunday he takes the established church; on Monday,

the presbyterian; on Tuesday, the Roman; on Wednesday, the quaker; and so throughout the week."

"You amaze me, sir," cried Hyde.

"It's true, I assure you," replied Prior.

"If you fail with Harley, come to me," said Saint-John. "I have no chaplain at present."

"Allow me to present to you the Right Honourable Henry Saint-John, secretary-at-war," said Prior to the parson.

"You lay me under everlasting obligation, sir," rejoined Hyde, with a respectful bow to Saint-John.

"No such thing, my good sir," replied the latter, "the obligation will be on my side. These are your two daughters, I presume," he added, advancing towards them.

"Lord bless you, no, Sir!" cried the

elderly lady. "I'm Mrs. Hyde, and this is my daughter, Angelica."

"I certainly took you for her sister, madam," replied Saint-John. "Why, you're not afraid of me, surely, that you turn away your head, my pretty Angelica?" he added to her. "I wont eat you."

"I'm not so sure of that, sir," she replied. "Mr. Greg said you were a terrible rake, and mother says that rakes are as bad as roaring lions."

"Oh, Mr. Greg called me a rake, did he?" cried Saint-John, forcing a laugh—"ha! ha! Mr. Greg is a facetious fellow, and was amusing himself at my expense—ha! ha! Here's my friend Mr. Prior, the first poet of the age, as well as the greatest moralist, will tell you a very different tale. How say you, Mat, do I deserve to be called a rake, eh?"

"Certainly not, Harry, any more than the great Alcibiades deserves to be so characterized," replied Prior. "Whoever said so, calumniated you shamefully."

"I begin to think so too," said Angelica, in an under-tone, to her mother. "He's a pure handsome gentleman, and doesn't look a bit as if he could do one a mischief."

"That he doesn't, replied her mother. "Mr. Greg must be quite out in his reckoning. It's quite clear the gentleman's no rake, for he doesn't know an old woman from a young one."

"That decides it," said Angelica.

"I see you have altered your opinion of me, Angelica," observed Saint-John. "You'll find, when you know me better, that I'm the modestest man breathing. If I have a fault, it is on that side."

"I would trust myself with him, though

he does think me so young, without hesitation," said Mrs. Hyde.

"So you might, and without the slightest apprehension," remarked Prior, aside.

"Well, my pretty Angelica, I must now wish you good day," said Saint-John, "for I have business that calls me hence. But be assured," he added, lowering his tone, "that I shall not lose sight of you. Your charms have produced a deep effect upon me."

Angelica coloured to the temples, and cast down her eyes.

"Good morning to you, madam," pursued Saint-John, turning to Mrs. Hyde. "Even after the assurance I have received, I can scarcely believe you to be Angelica's mother. You must have married preposterously early. Mr. Hyde, your humble

servant. You wont forget my promise, in case you fail with Mr. Harley?"

"I shall not neglect to remind you of it, sir," replied the parson, bowing.

And kissing his hand to Angelica, Saint-John quitted the room with Prior and the marquis.

"What did he say to you at parting, my dear?" inquired Mrs. Hyde of her daughter.

"Only how much he was struck by your extreme youthfulness, mother," replied Angelica.

"Well, it's very curious," simpered Mrs. Hyde. "I never heard anybody say I looked so young before—not even your father. But here comes Doctor Sacheverell. Now we shall have an audience of Mr. Harley. I almost hope the chaplaincy may

be given away, for then we shall go to Mr. Saint-John."

Angelica looked as if she quite concurred with her in opinion, and the usher advanced to conduct them to his master.

Harley's secret interview with the Queen, interrupted by the Duchess of Marlborough.

CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH IT IS SHEWN THAT THE DUCHESS OF MARLBOROUGH HAD NOT ENTIRELY LOST HER INFLUENCE OVER THE QUEEN.

No communication had passed between Harley and Abigail since the ball; but, at eleven o'clock, wrapped in a roquelaure, the secretary tracked the garden wall of the palace fronting Saint James's Park, until he came to a door. Scarcely had he reached it, when it was opened, by Abigail herself, it seemed—but the night was too dark to allow him to distinguish clearly—

and he was admitted into the garden. Not a word was said, but his conductress hurried along a walk in the direction of the palace, and he followed her at the same quick pace. She presently entered a door, and after he had passed through it, closed and fastened it noiselessly, and traversing a passage, ascended a staircase, which brought them to a room, where there was a light.

"I am almost frightened at what I have done," said Abigail, sinking into a chair; "for though I know I am only serving the queen, yet a clandestine interview, and especially at such an hour as this, is not at all to my taste."

"There is nothing to be alarmed at," replied Harley, divesting himself of his roquelaure, and shewing that he was in a full-dress suit of rich brown velvet. "If anybody need be alarmed," he added, ad-

justing his point-lace cravat before a glass, and arranging his peruke, which had got a little disordered in the walk, "it is myself."

"You don't exhibit much uneasiness," observed Abigail, laughing.

"Truth is, I feel none," replied Harley; "and my only sentiment is that of gratitude to you."

"A minister never remembers a favour, they say," rejoined Abigail.

"That may hold good with others, but not with me—at least, in your instance," returned Harley. "But may I ask, sweet coz, if you are still in the same mind with respect to young Masham?"

"I don't know," replied Abigail, carelessly. "Have you seen him to-day?"

"I have not," returned Harley; "but I have seen the Marquis de Guiscard."

"The odious wretch!" cried Abigail.

"Then you don't love him!" said Harley, in affected amazement.

"I can't abide him," cried Abigail.

"You have persuaded him to the contrary," said Harley.

"You know my motive," replied Abigail. "I was vexed with Masham, and resolved to pique him."

"And you have succeeded so well, that I fear you have got rid of him altogether," said Harley.

"Not so, cousin," rejoined Abigail. "I shall have him at my feet to-morrow."

"You are very confident," said Harley; "so confident, that I presume you have heard from him?"

"Not a word—not a line," she replied. "Harkee, cousin, we must understand each other. As yet, I have made no compact

with you. It is through me you are about to see the queen; but if you hope to repeat the visit, you must aid me in my plans respecting Masham. I have said I expect to have him at my feet to-morrow. It must be your business to place him there."

"But, cousin——"

"No buts," interrupted Abigail, peremptorily. "My will must be obeyed, or there are no more private interviews for you. I don't say I will forgive Mr. Masham. I don't say I mean ultimately to accept him —but I long to humble him—to torment him—to—in short, here he must be, at these feet to-morrow, full of penitence and affection."

"I will do my best, cousin, but——"

"Your best will not do," cried Abigail. "It *must be*, I tell you, or you don't see the queen now. I'm resolute, as you will find."

"Well, then, I give you my word it *shall be*," replied Harley. "Will that content you?"

"Perfectly," replied Abigail; "and now follow me. The queen awaits us."

So saying, she led the way along a narrow corridor, and entering an ante-chamber, proceeded to a door at the further end of it, against which she tapped gently, and was bidden by a sweet voice to come in. The next moment, she and her companion found themselves in the presence of the queen.

Anne was seated in an armed-chair, with a velvet footstool before her, and was attired in a white satin dress trimmed with the richest lace. She wore the blue riband across her shoulder, and a star upon her breast. The room in which she sat was a small closet, well adapted for an interview like the present, and was somewhat scantily

furnished, containing no other chair except that occupied by her majesty. A few pictures were hung against the walls, amongst the most conspicuous of which was a portrait of Prince George of Denmark.

"I have most ardently desired this interview, madam," said Harley, advancing towards the queen, and making a profound obeisance to her, "because, though my feelings of loyalty and devotion have for some time prompted me to address your majesty on a subject nearest my heart, yet the occasion for a full explanation has hitherto been wanting. I can now speak out, if I have your majesty's gracious permission to do so."

"I am well satisfied of your loyalty and devotion, Mr. Harley, and would gladly hear what you have to say," replied Anne.

"In a word, then, madam," said Harley, "it is with inexpressible concern that I

regard your present situation. Forgive me if I speak boldly, but it will little avail if I do not utter the truth; and at every hazard I will do so. The kindness of your nature has been abused by a violent and ambitious lady on whom you have bestowed your regard, to such an extent, that you are no longer sole mistress of your kingdom."

"This is indeed bold language, sir," said Anne, tapping her fan—a gesture habitual to her when displeased.

"I see I give offence, madam," pursued Harley; "but I entreat you to bear with me. My language can scarcely be too strong, when the Duchess of Marlborough proclaims everywhere that you can do nothing without her."

"Ah! does she so?" cried Anne, tapping her fan more impatiently than before. "It is time she were silenced."

"In good truth it is, madam," said Harley, "both for your own sake, and for the welfare of your country, so grievously oppressed by this rapacious dame, who, notwithstanding the numberless favours you have heaped upon her, complains of being inadequately rewarded."

"I knew she was ungrateful, but I did not believe to such an extent as this," cried the queen, angrily.

"But what I and all your majesty's loyal subjects chiefly complain of," pursued Harley, "is, that the imperious duchess, by her menaces, forces you into actions which you yourself disapprove, and which are eminently prejudicial to the interests of the country. On this ground, if on no other, I would urge her dismissal."

"I will think about it, sir," replied Anne,

irresolutely. "At all events, it cannot be now."

"If not now, madam, it will never be," said Harley, earnestly. "I pray you, pardon me, and attribute my importunity to my zeal. If you would indeed be a queen, the duchess must go. She stands between you and your nobles—between you and your parliaments—between you and your people. Far be it from me to adopt a course of conduct which I so strongly deprecate in this violent lady. Far be it from me to hold out threats. But my duty to your majesty requires that I should tell you plainly, that if you do not rid yourself of the duchess, you will rue it. You feel the annoyance occasioned by her imperious temper, but you cannot understand the mischief she does you."

"You are mistaken, sir. I *can* compre-

hend it, and I deplore it," replied Anne. "Oh, if I could remove her easily! But the scene will be terrible."

"Not if you will deign to follow my councils, madam," said Harley. "I have already expressed, through Abigail, my willingness to undertake the task of your liberation, and I have drawn up a plan which I will now submit to you. If this is exactly followed," he added, unfolding a piece of paper, "the duchess will save your majesty the trouble of dismissal, for she herself must retire."

"Let me hear it," cried the queen. "Ah!" she added, in alarm, as the noise of a key turning in a lock was heard, "the secret door! 'tis she!"

"Confusion!" exclaimed Harley, crushing the paper in his hand.

And as the exclamation was uttered, a

small side-door was thrown open, and the duchess burst into the room.

"So," she exclaimed, "you *are* here, Mr. Harley. I could not believe it, but I find it true. Knaves will dare anything. Your majesty does well to give secret audience to this double-dealing trickster."

After enjoying for a few seconds the confusion into which the party was thrown by her sudden and unexpected appearance, and darting a scornful and indignant glance at Harley, the Duchess of Marlborough advanced towards the queen, and said, in a tone of deep reproach, "Is it come to this, madam? Are my long and faithful services to be thus rewarded?"

"What mean you, duchess?" demanded Anne, vainly endeavouring to hide her embarrassment.

"Do not affect ignorance, madam," re-

plied the duchess, contemptuously. "It will not avail you. I know how, and by whom, Mr. Harley was brought here, and why. The scheme was worthy of him—worthy of his hypocritical ally; but unworthy, most unworthy of you. What must be the object of an interview that requires to be clandestinely conducted? What must it be when the Queen of England blushes—ay, blushes—to be detected in it!"

"No more of this, duchess!" exclaimed Anne, angrily.

"Nay, I *will* speak out, madam," returned the other; "if they are the last words I shall ever utter to you. I will shew you how much you have been deceived by this double-dealing, insidious fellow, who stands abashed in my presence, though he dared just now to lift up his head loftily enough in yours. This miserable turncoat,

I say, who now comes to you, would have been glad to make any terms with me. But I rejected his proffer with disdain. I would not use him even as a tool. In revenge, he has recourse to the vilest stratagems, and having reached your majesty by means which only *he*, or some one equally base, would resort to, pours his poison in your ear, which luckily proves as innocuous as it was malignantly and murtherously intended. Let him deny this if he can."

"I *do* deny it," replied Harley, who by this time had fully recovered his composure; "most unequivocally deny it. Your majesty has now heard the duchess out, and I could not desire a better advocate for my cause than she has proved. Setting aside her false and frivolous charges against myself, which I utterly repudiate and contemn, I would ask your majesty whether my com-

plaint is not fully borne out by her present behaviour? Is her language towards you that of a subject? Is her tone that of a subject? Is her deportment that of a subject? What warrant has she for this intrusion? It is not for the Duchess of Marlborough to dictate to your majesty whom you shall receive, and at what hour you shall receive them. Neither is it for the duchess to thrust herself unasked into your secret conferences. If she knew I was here, and with your gracious permission, she should have carefully kept away. But I rejoice that she has come. I rejoice to be enabled to meet her face to face before your majesty, to tell her that she is wanting in gratitude and respect towards you, and to repeat my flat contradiction to her assertion, which I defy her to prove."

"You lie," cried the duchess, transported

beyond all bounds, and striking him in the face with her fan.

"Duchess, you forget yourself," interposed the queen, quickly, but with dignity.

"I must crave your majesty's permission to retire," said Harley, almost white with constrained passion. "The duchess's tongue is sharp enough, as you have heard; but when she employs weapons which I cannot use, the contest is too unequal to be carried on further."

"I pray you remain, sir," said Anne, beseechingly; "and if the duchess has any desire to please me, she will ask your pardon for her violence."

"I am sorry to disobey you, madam," replied the duchess; "but till Mr. Harley retracts the falsehood he has uttered, I shall do no such thing. Ask his pardon, forsooth! Not I. Let him bear the blow as

well as he can. He has borne as much ere now, I'll warrant, and in silence. But I have yet a word more for him. His presence at this clandestine interview, and the arts he has used towards your majesty, constitute a direct breach of faith towards the cabinet to which he belongs; and no honourable alternative remains to him, but retirement."

"I shall take leave to hold my post in defiance of your grace, as long as I can be serviceable to her majesty," replied Harley.

"Precisely what might be expected from you, sir," said the duchess; "but your dismissal *will* follow, nevertheless."

"Your grace's may possibly precede it," retorted Harley.

"An end must be put to this altercation," interposed Anne, peremptorily.

"I crave your majesty's pardon for the

share I have been compelled to take in it," rejoined Harley; "and if I venture to prolong it for a few moments, it is because I think some explanation absolutely necessary after the scandalous remarks of the duchess. Whether I adopted unfair means to reach your majesty, you best know; but if I have not proceeded more directly, it has been because you are so surrounded by the duchess's creatures, that such a course must have been unsuccessful. Of the manner in which this system of espionage is carried on by the duchess, your majesty can form an idea from the fact that the private interview you condescended to grant me to-night, has been disclosed to her. And now, madam, with your gracious permission, I will proceed with what I was saying when this interruption occurred. You yourself have admitted an anxiety to shake off the

yoke which your too confiding nature has imposed upon you."

"This cannot be true, madam?" cried the duchess. "Give him the lie—give him the lie."

"Her majesty's silence is sufficient answer," replied Harley. "Does not your grace perceive that by your overweening pride—by your violence, and by your rapacity, you have alienated the affections of a too-indulgent mistress? Nothing but the good-nature you have presumed upon, has enabled you to retain your place. But I tell you, in the queen's presence, and in her voice, that it is her wish, her command, that you should retire from it."

"Ha!" exclaimed the duchess, with a roar like that of a lioness.

"Mr. Harley, you go too far," said the queen, much alarmed.

"No, your majesty," replied Harley, "I will take all upon my head. I will tell this imperious woman that her reign is over—that you are determined to emancipate yourself from her thraldom—and be the great queen you ought to be, and are. A moment's resolution will do it. The step is taken. The scene you dreaded *has* occurred. Bid her leave the room, and surrender her places, and you are indeed mistress of your kingdom. Bid her go."

"That word will never be pronounced by the queen, sir," said the duchess, undauntedly.

"Your majesty's freedom hangs on a breath," whispered Abigail. "Recollect how much you have suffered."

"Duchess," said the queen, in a voice of emotion, "I must——"

"Before you proceed, madam," inter-

rupted the duchess, "let me have a word. I will not wrong myself by any comparison with the persons I have found in your presence. I hold them as nothing, except so far as your majesty deigns to make them of importance. I will not remind you how unceasingly my energies have been devoted to your service—how, ever since you mounted the throne, I have had but one thought—the advancement of your glory——"

"With an occasional bye-reflection as to your own aggrandizement," remarked Harley, sarcastically.

"I will not remind you of my great husband's services in the field and in the state," pursued the duchess, disregarding the remark; "but I will confine myself to the friendship with which I have been honoured for many—many years, and which refers,

not to public, but to domestic affairs. Our secret feelings have been interchanged—our joys, our afflictions, have been shared. We have each mourned—mourned in concert—a son lost. Love made us equals. Mrs. Freeman and Mrs. Morley were once dear to each other—very—very dear."

"They were—they were," said Anne, much moved.

"And shall it all be forgotten?" asked the duchess.

"It is Mrs. Freeman's own fault," replied the queen. "She has driven her friend to it."

"She will make any atonement her friend pleases," said the duchess, penitentially; "nay, more, she will promise not to offend again."

"Is it possible!" cried Anne; "if such were really the case——"

"Doubt it not," replied the duchess, throwing herself at the queen's feet, who instantly raised her, and embraced her affectionately.

"Dear Mrs. Freeman," exclaimed Anne.

"Dearest Mrs. Morley," cried the duchess.

"This coup de théatre has ruined all," muttered Harley, with a significant glance at Abigail. "Madam," he added to the queen, "I presume I may now retire. My further presence can neither be necessary nor desirable."

"Before you go, sir, I must insist upon a reconciliation between you and the duchess," said the queen. "Nay, duchess, you were wrong, and it is for you to make the advance. What! you hesitate? Will Mrs. Freeman refuse Mrs. Morley's request?"

"That appeal is irresistible," replied the

duchess. "Mr. Harley, I was too hasty." And she extended her hand to him.

"I take your grace's hand as it is given," replied Harley, advancing towards her. "This is a harder blow than the other," he added, in a low tone.

The duchess smiled triumphantly.

"Henceforth, all hostilities must cease between you," said the queen.

"Willingly, on condition that this is the last private interview between your majesty and Mr. Harley," rejoined the duchess.

"Willingly, on condition that her grace always maintains her present amiable deportment," subjoined Harley. "Mrs. Freeman is infinitely to be preferred to the Duchess of Marlborough.

"Peace being restored, I shall retire," said the queen, smiling.

"What, without a word in private with

your poor faithful Freeman," whispered the duchess, coaxingly.

"To-morrow," replied the queen. "I am too much fatigued now. This interview has quite exhausted me. Good night, Mr. Harley. Abigail will see you forth."

So saying, and returning the secretary's profound bow, she withdrew with her attendant.

The duchess and Harley regarded each other for some moments fixedly in silence.

"Either you or I must retire from this contest, Mr. Harley," said the former, at length.

"It is not for me to tell your grace which of the two it shall be," he replied. "But I have no intention of withdrawing."

"Then I know how to act," said the duchess.

"There is no chance of a coalition, I

suppose?" he insinuated, in his smoothest tones.

"With you—never!" replied the duchess, contemptuously.

At this moment, Abigail returned.

"I wish your grace good night," said the secretary, bowing ceremoniously.

"Good night, sir," replied the duchess. "I will take care this is the last time you are seen here."

"Heed her not," said Abigail, as they quitted the room; "the queen is as much your friend as ever. Fulfil my injunctions respecting Mr. Masham implicitly, and you shall have another interview as soon as you please."

CHAPTER X.

OF THE PROVOCATION OFFERED BY MASHAM TO THE MARQUIS DE GUISCARD AT THE SAINT JAMES'S COFFEE-HOUSE; AND OF THE CHALLENGE THAT ENSUED.

A DEEPER impression had been made by Abigail upon Masham than he cared to acknowledge. He could not render himself indifferent to her, and her very capriciousness seemed to make her more attractive. A ride in the park failing to distract his thoughts, he repaired to the Saint James's Coffee-house, where he found the Earl of

Sunderland conversing very eagerly with a gentleman of good figure, and remarkably intelligent countenance, who was well known to him as Mr. Arthur Maynwaring.

Descended from a branch of a very old Cheshire family, which had settled at Ightfield, in Shropshire, and connected on the maternal side with the ancient and important families of the Egertons and Cholmondeleys, Mr. Maynwaring was as much distinguished for his high-breeding and polished exterior, as for his wit, scholarship, and general ability. An admirable political writer; a keen satirist and critic; and an authority on all matters of taste and learning,—Maynwaring had recently received a lucrative appointment as auditor of the imprests from Lord Godolphin. He sat in parliament as member for Preston in Lancashire, and being completely in the confi-

dence of the Duchess of Marlborough, frequently acted as her private secretary. In age, Maynwaring was nearly forty. He was a member of the Kit-Cat-Club, and accounted one of its chief ornaments.

The earl and his companion looked up on Masham's entrance, and their manner made him fancy that he himself formed the subject of their discourse. Nor was he mistaken; for as he was passing on to another part of the coffee-room, Sunderland called to him, and said, "We were speaking of you, Masham, and I have been diverting Maynwaring with an account of what occurred at the palace last night."

"Just the way Abigail serves every one," laughed Maynwaring. "And I have no doubt, in spite of the encouragement she gave Guiscard, who has a right now to fancy himself the suitor elect, she will scarcely

deign to notice him to-day. Who would be a slave to such a capricious creature?"

"Ay, who indeed?" echoed Sunderland, laughing.

Masham could not repress a sigh.

"For the credit of our sex, I hope you wont let her perceive the power she has over you," said Maynwaring, noticing the other's emotion.

"If Masham feels himself in danger, let him absent himself from court for a few days," observed Sunderland.

"That would never do," rejoined Maynwaring. "A thousand jests would be in circulation at his expense, and he would never survive the ridicule. No, he must stay and boldly face the enemy. The true way to mortify her, will be to affect perfect indifference, and whatever lures she may throw out, whatever wiles practise, appear utterly insensible to them"

"I should be better pleased to pique her as she piqued me," returned Masham.

"You are not master enough of yourself for that," said Maynwaring. "Indifference, real or affected, must be your game. He is in love with her," he observed in a low voice to Sunderland, as Masham stepped aside for a moment.

"Evidently so," replied the other in the same tone. "If they meet, a reconciliation will infallibly take place. It must be our business to prevent it, till she is fully compromised with Guiscard. If we could but get him away for a week."

"Ah! but he wont go," returned Maynwaring, laughing.

"Again amusing yourselves at my expense, gentlemen," observed Masham, returning.

"I was merely observing to Sunderland," replied Maynwaring, "that I think

Abigail's influence with the queen vastly over-rated."

"I'm sure of it," replied the earl; "Guiscard will find out his error if he thinks to secure his own advancement by marrying her. When she weds, she will of course lose her place."

"Not of course, I believe," observed Masham.

"Oh, yes," rejoined Maynwaring. "But what matters it? The French adventurer will be rightly served."

"I should not mind the loss of place, if she had a heart," sighed Masham, "but she evidently has none."

"Not a bit more than Guiscard himself," replied Maynwaring, "so they will be nicely matched. Adsdeath! here comes the marquis."

As the exclamation was uttered, Guiscard,

accompanied by Saint-John and Prior, entered the coffee-room. As the new-comers drew near, Saint-John said, laughingly, "Good day, gentlemen. I've a piece of news which will delight you all, especially Masham. We are to have a marriage at court."

"A marriage!" exclaimed Maynwaring. "Between whom?"

"Between Monsieur le Marquis de Guiscard and the fair Abigail Hill," replied Saint-John. "Here is the marquis to receive your congratulations."

"Is it settled, then?" asked Masham, hastily.

"Mr. Saint-John is, perhaps, going a little too far in saying that it is actually arranged," replied Guiscard; "but I hope the marriage will not be long delayed."

"Accept our best wishes for the speedy

completion of your happiness, marquis," said Sunderland and Maynwaring together.

"'Sdeath, Masham," cried Prior, "why don't you offer your congratulations likewise? The marquis will be a great man presently, and it is prudent and proper to worship the rising sun."

"Let those worship it who like. I want nothing from him," replied the young equerry, walking moodily away.

"A disappointed rival!" said Sunderland to Guiscard. "Ah! marquis, you are a lucky fellow!"

"Deuced lucky!" cried Maynwaring. "You haven't decided yet for Whig or Tory, I presume?"

"Pardon me," replied Prior. "Guiscard is with us. And if Sunderland finds some one in his post within a month, he will know who placed him there."

A loud laugh followed this sally.

"Gentlemen," said Masham, returning quickly, and looking angrily round, "I should be glad to know the cause of your merriment."

A general burst of merriment was the response.

"This young Masham thinks everybody is laughing at him to-day," said Sunderland. "On the contrary, my good fellow, we sincerely condole with you—Ha! ha!"

"Your mirth has but slight grounds for it, my lord," replied Masham, sternly. "You are willing to take Guiscard's word for his acceptance by Miss Hill. For my own part, I doubt it."

"How, sir?" cried the marquis.

"I more than doubt it," pursued Masham, loudly and emphatically,—"I believe it to be wholly false!"

The laughter was instantly hushed, and some other persons, who chanced to be in the coffee-room at the time, gathered round the group.

"Pshaw, my dear Masham," said Maynwaring, "you let your vexation at our friend's success carry you too far. Marquis, you will make due allowance for his disappointed feelings."

"Most assuredly," replied Guiscard; "I am willing to take no notice of the affront. Masham knows not what he says."

"You shall not get off thus, marquis," rejoined Masham, with increasing anger. "I repeat—deliberately repeat—that you have imposed upon this company."

"Mr. Masham hopes to cut my throat, in order to remove an obstacle between him and Miss Hill," observed Guiscard, with suppressed anger, "but I will disappoint him."

"You are quite in the wrong, Masham," said Sunderland, taking the young equerry aside,—"on my honour, you are. Granting this vain-glorious Frenchman has advanced more than he has warrant for, you will only give Abigail new cause for triumph by thus playing the Quixote for her. Allow me to reconcile matters. I can do so at once, without compromising you in the slightest degree."

"I will only retract what I have said on receiving from Miss Hill's own lips a confirmation of the marquis's statement," replied Masham, sullenly.

"Pshaw, you know that to be impossible," said the earl. "Be reasonable."

The young equerry shook his head.

"Since there is no help for it, gentlemen, I suppose you must meet," said Sunderland, turning round.

"Most certainly, my lord," replied the marquis,—"most certainly we *must* meet. And I trust no one here will attempt to interfere. We are all men of honour."

There was a slight responsive murmur among the company, and those who were strangers immediately withdrew.

"Mr. Maynwaring, may I count upon you as my friend?" said Masham.

"Unquestionably," was the reply, "though I confess I would rather assist to settle the matter in any other way. But since that may not be, I shall be happy to attend you."

"And I conclude I may calculate on you, Mr. Saint-John?" said the marquis.

Saint-John bowed.

"Where, and at what hour, shall the meeting take place, gentlemen?" he inquired.

"As early as agreeable to the marquis," replied Masham, "and in Hyde Park, if he has no objection."

"Hyde Park will suit me as well as any other place," replied Guiscard, "and the earlier the better; because, as I shall sit up till the hour of meeting, I shall get to bed the sooner."

"These preliminaries arranged, gentlemen," said Saint-John, "I presume you can meet without annoyance to each other. And I therefore beg the favour of your company at supper to-night, as well as that of all our friends here. A few choice spirits have promised to come to me; and when I tell you I expect Mrs. Bracegirdle and Mrs. Oldfield, I am sure I need offer you no further inducement."

The invitation was eagerly accepted by all except Masham, who would willingly

have declined it, but Maynwaring whispering him that his refusal might be misconstrued, he reluctantly assented; and, after a little further conversation, the party separated.

Trial of skill between Mrs Bracegirdle and Mrs Oldfield at Mr Saint Johns supper.

CHAPTER XI.

OF THE ASSEMBLAGE OF WITS MET BY MASHAM AT SUPPER AT MR. SAINT-JOHN'S, AND OF THE MEANS PROPOSED BY HIM OF ADJUSTING A QUARREL BETWEEN MRS. BRACEGIRDLE AND MRS. OLDFIELD.

HAVING dined alone, and made such preparations as he thought necessary for the meeting of the morrow, Masham betook himself, about ten o'clock, to Saint-John's residence in Saint James's-place. The party, which was more numerous than he expected, had already sat down to table,

but a place was reserved for him between Maynwaring and Prior, into which he slipped as quietly as he could. Most of the guests were known to Masham personally, and all by reputation; and as he surveyed the assemblage, which comprised many of the most eminent wits of the day, he could not but feel that he had little title to the place among them.

At the head of the table, as a matter of course, sat Saint-John, who appeared in most buoyant spirits, and on his right was a lady with a most fascinating expression of countenance, fine dark eyes of extraordinary brilliancy, and hair and eyebrows of the same shade. Though a brunette, her complexion had a rich bloom in it, and though in the maturity of life, her charms had lost none of their attraction. Her smile was witchery itself, as thousands who

had felt it make its way at once to the heart could testify. This was the admirable actress, Mrs. Anne Bracegirdle, than whom a lovelier or more accomplished woman never trod the boards.

On her right sat a gentleman of very courtly appearance, possessing smooth, handsome features, who paid her the most devoted attention, and who was addressed by her as Mr. Congreve. Next to Congreve sat another wit, but scarcely so polished in manner, or so regularly handsome, though his features were fine and interesting notwithstanding, and he was quite equal to the other in comic genius.

Sir John Vanbrugh—for he it was—was conversing with an elderly man, who, notwithstanding a stoop in the shoulders, the total absence of teeth, and deep wrinkles in the cheeks, which defied the power of rouge

and paint to efface, affected the air of a youthful beau, and wore a dress made in the extravagance of the fashion, with a point-lace cravat, point-lace ruffles, and a flowing peruke, while costly rings bedecked his fingers. In this antiquated figure, whose shaking limbs and blear eyes seemed ill fitted for the revel, could scarcely be recognised the once handsome, and still witty friend of Sedley, Rochester, Etheridge, and Buckingham, the boon companion of the Merry Monarch himself, whose good looks and brilliant reputation had won him the hand of the young, wealthy, and beautiful Countess of Drogheda, and whose comedies are scarcely, if at all, inferior to those of Congreve and Vanbrugh—namely, William Wycherley.

On Wycherley's other hand was a young man of rather prim air, and plain attire, but whose looks bespoke shrewdness and

good sense, and whose name was Tickell. He was paying profound attention to the discourse of his neighbour, a handsome man, with a florid complexion, and a somewhat stout person, displayed to advantage in a suit of peach-coloured velvet, and who was no less distinguished an individual than Joseph Addison.

The great essayist, who had not, however, at that time, given to the world the full assurance of his unequalled powers, but was chiefly known by his travels, his poem entitled the "Campaign," and a trifling opera called "Rosamond," filled the post of under-secretary to the Earl of Sunderland, who had continued him in the office on his succession to Sir Charles Hedges, from whom Addison originally received the appointment.

Addison's neighbour, on the right, was

the gay, the social, the kindly, the thoughtless Richard Steele, upon whose excitable temperament the pleasures of the table and the deep libations that succeeded (for those were hard-drinking days) had already produced a far more pernicious effect than upon his phlegmatic friend, the under-secretary. Captain Steele, for he had recently procured a commission in Lord Lucas's regiment, through the interest of his friend, the brave Lord Cutts, was chiefly occupied at that time in conducting the *Gazette*, in which his chief aim, according to his own account, was to be "as innocent and insipid as possible;" and it must be owned his success was fully equal to his intentions. Steele had been for some time a widower, but was, at this particular period of his life, paying court to Miss Scurlock, to whom he was subsequently united. The dissolute courses

he had indulged in had left their impression on his features, which, though puffy and cadaverous, were nevertheless expressive. Black overhanging brows, deep-set eyes, a broad and somewhat coarse visage, a figure thick-set and square, and a military attire, may give some idea of his personal appearance.

Captain Steele's attentions were directed towards his neighbour, a young and singularly beautiful woman, with a slight but graceful figure, and an archness of look and manner perfectly irresistible. This was Mrs. Bracegirdle's rival, Mrs. Oldfield, who had lately risen into fame, and divided the town with her. All Steele's gallantries, however, were thrown away. Mrs. Oldfield had ears and eyes only for the soft speeches and tender glances of Mr. Maynwaring, who sat on her right, and with whom, it may be

mentioned in passing, she afterwards formed a long and lasting attachment, only closed by his death.

Passing over Maynwaring, Masham, Prior, and Sunderland, we come to the tragic poet, Nicholas Rowe, the author of the "Fair Penitent," whose somewhat saturnine countenance was convulsed with laughter at the jests of his neighbour, the facetious Tom D'Urfey, who, like Wycherley, was one of the wits of the previous century, and upon whose shoulders Charles the Second himself had often leaned, to hum a snatch. No one, indeed, in former days could troll a ditty more merrily than old Tom; nor could any one write a choicer song of the amorous and convivial description in vogue when he was in his prime.

Like Wycherley, Tom D'Urfey was a good deal the worse for wear. The wonder would

have been if he were not, considering the rollicking, reckless life he had led; but in spite of rheumatism, flying gout, and other aches and pains, it would be difficult to find a jollier old fellow than Tom, or one who enjoyed the good things of life more, or deserved them better. He was somewhat shabbily attired, it is true, for Tom was not one of your prosperous wits. But what of that? His coat might be threadbare, but his jests were fresh and glossy, and far more genial than those of the refined and freezing Congreve; and as to his laugh, it was joviality itself.

Tom D'Urfey had truly a lyrical genius, and was utterly free from the affectation which is the besetting sin of modern ballad-mongers; but he was besides an indefatigable labourer for the stage, and composed in his time above thirty comedies, all, or most

of which, are forgotten. Alas! Poor Tom! there is but a faint and far-off echo of thee and thy pleasantries in these degenerate days.

Guiscard was D'Urfey's neighbour, and next to the marquis sat Mrs. Centlivre, the witty authoress of several excellent but licentious comedies,—though no more licentious than the taste of the time required,—three of which, "The Busy-Body," "The Wonder: a Woman Keeps a Secret," and "A Bold Stroke for a Wife," still keep their hold of the stage. Mrs. Centlivre had some little personal beauty, and had been thrice married, her last husband, Mr. Joseph Centlivre, being yeoman of the mouth, otherwise cook, to King William the Third. Her latest comedy, the "Platonic Lady," had just been produced with some success at the Haymarket.

Mrs. Centlivre's right-hand neighbour was Sir Samuel Garth, the celebrated poet and physician, a man as much esteemed for his amiable and social qualities as for his professional talent and poetical ability. Garth was a stout, handsome-looking man, with large features, of the mould which seems so peculiar to the period in which he flourished, and was attired in black velvet. On his further side sat another lady, the fourth and last that the party comprehended, and who was likewise a writer of dramatic works, which had procured her some reputation, though she subsequently became far more notorious by the production of the "New Atalantis."

Though in the hey-day of her life, Mrs. Manley had little more than her wit to recommend her; but she had great conversational powers, and a turn for satire which,

combined with an intimate acquaintance (how derived is not worth inquiring) with what was going on in the political world, and the world generally, gave great piquancy to her discourse. In our own days, she would unquestionably have made a first-rate fashionable novelist.

Next to Mrs. Centlivre sat Mr. Godfrey Kneller, the great painter, (Kneller, it may incidentally be mentioned, received his baronetage from George the First,)—a man of courtly appearance, handsome person and features, though a little on the decline, and most refined manners; and next to Kneller was Mr. Hughes, a scholar and a poet, then chiefly known by his elegant translations of Horace and Lucan, but subsequently distinguished by his tragedy, called the "Siege of Damascus," and the papers he contributed to the Tatler, the Spectator, and the Guar-

dian. With him the circuit of the table is completed.

The repast was magnificently served, as well as admirable and abundant. A crowd of lacqueys in Saint-John's sumptuous livery were in attendance. The table groaned with the finest chased silver dishes, and sparkled with crystal glass; and as dish after dish of exquisite flavour disappeared, delicacies still more tempting succeeded. The wines were poured forth in equal profusion, and the produce of the choicest vintages of France, Spain, Germany, and even Hungary, was quaffed in bumpers. The glasses were not allowed to stand empty a moment, and there was a constant discharge of champagne corks.

An incomparable host was Saint-John. He had none of the airs of a petit-maitre, leaving his guests to shift for themselves,

but did the honours of his table hospitably and well. By his sprightly sallies he kept up an incessant roar of laughter, and the only person upon whose brow a slight cloud could be discerned, and who appeared to have no zest for the rich viands or the delicious wines, was Masham.

"Mr. Masham looks like the rejected lover in a comedy," observed Mrs. Bracegirdle, in her exquisite voice, which gave to words of little import significance the most extraordinary.

"Nay, by my faith," cried Saint-John, "it is not acting with him. Masham is foolish enough to love a woman after she has agreed to give her hand to another; and, what is more, nothing will content him but the life of his fortunate rival."

"You are too hard upon the young gentleman, Mr. Saint-John," said Mrs. Old-

field, whose accents were quite as musical and delicious as those of Mrs. Bracegirdle; "if he is really in love, he is much to be pitied. I vow he is the only person here who knows anything of the passion, unless it be Mr. Tickell. If your lady-love has jilted you, sir," she added to Masham, "forget her, or supply her place with another."

"I could easily do that, Mrs. Oldfield," replied the young equerry, gallantly.

"I hope you don't mean to be so silly as to risk your life for her?" pursued the lady.

"Permit me the honour of wine with you," rejoined Masham, evasively.

"With great pleasure," she replied; "but I must have an answer to my question. Some women like to be the cause of a duel; but I should hate the man who fought for me; or rather I should hate myself, which would come to the same thing. Ladies, let

us take Mr. Masham under our special protection. It would be a thousand pities if so pretty a fellow were cut off in the flower of his youth, and all for a senseless jilt. Your voices, I'm sure, will be with me. Fight he must not."

"Certainly not," cried the three other ladies, in a breath.

"You hear, sir," said Mrs. Oldfield. "We are four to one. You cannot disoblige so many fair supplicants. And now, let us know who is your rival?"

"You will make me his rival, if you go on thus," remarked Maynwaring, somewhat petulantly.

"Mrs. Oldfield is bent upon a conquest, it seems," observed Mrs. Bracegirdle, in a low tone to Saint-John.

"A glance from you will win him from her," replied the other; "you have often

carried off a whole house in the same way."

"I'll try," said Mrs. Bracegirdle, "if only to mortify the vain thing.—Mr. Masham," she continued, aloud, and throwing one of her irresistible glances at him, "I am curious to know what sort of person it is that has inspired you with so deep a passion."

"Ay, do tell us, Mr. Masham?" said Mrs. Centlivre.

"She is young and beautiful, of course?" cried Mrs. Manley.

"And wealthy, also, it is to be hoped?" added Mrs. Centlivre.

"Do—do describe her?" cried Mrs. Oldfield. "Does she resemble any of us—Mrs. Bracegirdle, for instance?"

"Or Mrs. Oldfield?" rejoined the other actress.

Here was a general laugh.

"Masham will have a second duel on his hands ere long, I begin to think," said Congreve, glancing at Mrs. Bracegirdle.

"He will have a third," rejoined Maynwaring, "and will have to provide himself with another second, for I shall be obliged to take part as a principal."

"Really, gentlemen, I am unconscious of giving you offence," said Masham.

"I'll take Mr. Congreve's quarrel off your hands," said Mrs. Bracegirdle. "If he fights any one, it shall be me."

"And since Mr. Maynwaring has thrown up his office, I shall be happy to attend you as second," said Mrs. Oldfield. "I can manage an affair of the kind quite as well as him. As for swords, I've plenty at your service, and pistols too, if needed. You shan't blush for your second, for I'll come

in my town gallant's apparel. You remember *Betty Goodfield*, in the 'Woman turned Bully?' 'Udsbud, sir," she added, assuming the look and tone of the character, "'do you come here only to ask questions? This is not to be endured. You have wasted my whole stock of patience, and now you shall find me an errant lion. Come, sir, draw!' "

This speech, delivered in the liveliest manner imaginable, elicited thunders of applause from the assemblage.

"Mr. Masham will prove irresistible, if so attended," said Wycherly. "'Gad! I thought the modern stage degenerate, but I find the old spirit of Nell Gwyn and Mrs. Kneppe revived in Mrs. Oldfield."

"With a little more discretion, I hope, Mr. Wycherley," replied the pretty actress.

"Ah! Mr. Wycherley," cried Tom

D'Urfey, "things are greatly changed since those inimitable plays, the 'Country Wife' and the 'Plain Dealer' were given to the world. It's full thirty years since the last made its appearance; and if you had had any industry, or any necessity, you would have given us a comedy every successive year, and then how rich our drama would have been! Talking of the 'Plain Dealer,' how well I recollect Hart as *Manly*, Kynaston as *Freeman*, Mrs. Cory as *Widow Blackacre*—wondrous *Widow Blackacre!*—and Kneppe, pretty Mrs. Kneppe, as *Eliza!* You should give us another comedy before you quit the stage altogether, sir."

"I shall marry, and give you a farce, Tom," replied Wycherley, with some acerbity. "But why don't you appeal to Mr. Congreve? No man has written such comedies, and yet he has foresworn the stage."

"Don't remind me of the indiscretions of my youth, Wycherley," replied Congreve. "I've seen the error of my ways, and mean to avoid it in future."

"Congreve has been converted by Collier, though he answered him so sharply at the time of the attack," said Vanbrugh, laughing, "and thinks the theatres licentious and profane."

"Their morals will certainly remain questionable as long as you continue to write for them, Van," rejoined Congreve.

"'Sdeath!" cried Vanbrugh, "am I to paint men and manners as they *are*, or as they *are not?*"

"You paint them in colours so true, that your portraits will endure for ever, Sir John," observed Kneller. "When people become over-fastidious, it is a bad sign of the morality of the times."

"One thing is quite certain," remarked Addison, "that the English stage owes its revival to the genius of the two great comic writers here present, and if they had not exerted their matchless powers for its support, it is doubtful whether we should not have altogether been deprived of a most delightful and intellectual amusement. No, Mr. Congreve, the stage owes you too much to allow you to disown your connexion with it."

"I am sorry to say it in the presence of so many distinguished dramatists," cried Congreve, "but on my soul I cannot think writing for the stage the employment of a gentleman."

"Oh, fie, Mr. Congreve!" rejoined Rowe; "this is rank heresy in you, and worse than abusing a woman who has bestowed her favours upon you. A fine play is

the noblest achievement of the human mind."

"The author of the Fair Penitent and Tamerlane has a right to say so," remarked Garth. "I can well understand that Mr. Congreve, having obtained so high a reputation, should not care to shake it; but that he should underrate the drama, for which he has done so much, passes my comprehension."

"I do not underrate the drama, Sir Samuel," replied Congreve, "nor do I shrink from the stage from fear of failure, but from distaste. I dislike notoriety, and if I could do twenty times better than I have done, I would not write again; nay, I am sorry I ever wrote a line."

"Is he sincere, think you?" asked Guiscard of Prior.

"As sincere as you would be," replied

the poet, "if, after winning ten thousand pounds at hazard, you were to say you would never play again, and protest you wished you never *had* played. He is prudent, and does not wish to lose what he has gained. Besides, with a strange kind of vanity, he values himself more upon being thought a fine gentleman than an author."

"Fortunately for us, my dear Congreve, your wish not to have written comes too late for fulfilment," said Saint-John. "It would be well, perhaps, if some of us could recal our early effusions, but you are not of the number. Meantime, we are neglecting the wine. Captain Steele, I pledge you."

"My service to you," replied Steele, taking off a brimmer. "Congreve is right on one point," he continued. "The great

secret is to know when to leave off. An entrance is more easily made than an exit. But though I hold this to be a sound rule, I don't mean to act up to it myself, but shall go on as long as I can find an audience to listen to me, or a bookseller to purchase my wares. Both will soon let me know when they have had enough."

"Ay, it was ever your rule, Dick, to declaim like a philosopher, and to act like a rake," rejoined Addison.

"There I only imitate you, Joe," replied Steele, "who write in praise of temperance in a style as pure and clear as water itself, with a bottle of old Oporto before you."

"That shan't prevent my taking a glass with you now, you scandalous dog," replied Addison; "what shall it be — burgundy?"

"Ay, burgundy," replied Steele; "'tis a

generous wine, and floods one's veins like the hot blood of youth."

Soon after this, the cloth was removed, and bowls of punch, mulled burgundy, and claret were placed on the board. Tom D'Urfey volunteered a song, and although his voice was a little cracked, executed one of his old anacreontic melodies very creditably.

Mrs. Bracegirdle was next prevailed upon to sing, and roused her hearers to a state of rapture, which was by no means lessened when her fair rival, Mrs. Oldfield, followed her in a voice of surpassing richness and sweetness. Both ladies were most vociferously applauded in their turns, their mutual supporters trying to outvie each other in the expression of their admiration.

Saint-John, whose spirits appeared inexhaustible, and who was the soul of a

revel, as of aught else he engaged in, took care that the exhilaration of the party should receive no check; and so well did he fan the flame of mirth that it blazed up more joyously each moment, and spread so fast and freely, that even Masham caught the infection, forgot his anxieties, and laughed as loudly and heartily as the rest.

By this time, the various generous liquors had begun to produce an effect upon the company; the conversation became a little more noisy, and the laughter rather more uproarious. Perfect decorum, however, was observed; but there were more talkers than listeners, and Tom D'Urfey, in spite of the assistance of the host, could not obtain attention for another stave. To hide his disappointment, during a momentary lull of the clatter, he called upon Mrs.

Oldfield, but an opposition was instantly made by the supporters of Mrs. Bracegirdle, who said she was under a promise to them, and their rights could not be deferred. In vain Saint-John interposed; the dispute instantly rose to a fiery heat, and many sharp speeches were interchanged, when a happy idea suggested itself to the host.

"A means of settling this matter occurs to me, ladies," he said. "Will you leave it to Mr. Masham to decide who shall sing first?"

Both immediately expressed their assent, and turned to the young equerry, who looked as much puzzled as the shepherd Paris, when required to bestow the golden apple upon the fairest goddess. Without giving himself, however, more than a momont's consideration, he named Mrs. Bracegirdle, who, radiant with triumph, began

to pour forth strains like those of a syren. But she was not allowed to proceed far, for Mrs. Oldfield, who was deeply mortified, began to talk and laugh aloud to Maynwaring, upon which the fair singer instantly stopped, and in spite of Saint-John's entreaties refused to proceed, — her anger being increased by the insulting looks of her rival.

"We have been talking of duels just now," she cried; "I wish they were allowed amongst women. I should like to punish the insolence of that creature."

"Don't baulk yourself, if you are so disposed, my dear," rejoined Mrs. Oldfield, with a sarcastic laugh. "I will meet you whenever and wherever you please; and as we are both accustomed to male attire, we can so array ourselves for the occasion."

"I wish you would dare to make good

your word, madam," replied Mrs. Bracegirdle.

"If you doubt me, and are in a hurry, my dear," replied Mrs. Oldfield, "You have but to step into the next room, and we can settle the matter at once."

"Here will be a pretty piece of work," cried Prior; "a duel between our two fairest actresses. Whoever survives, we shall be losers."

"'Sdeath, this passes a jest," exclaimed Saint-John.

"We will fight with pistols," cried Mrs. Oldfield, heedless of Maynwaring's remonstrances. "I have practised at the mark, and am a dead shot."

"Agreed," replied Mrs. Bracegirdle; "I am as good a shot as yourself."

"What say you to arranging the affair in this way, ladies?" interposed Masham.

"You both profess to be good shots. I will hold a candle, and you shall post yourselves at the extremity of the room, and she who snuffs it shall be adjudged the victor."

"I assent," said Mrs. Oldfield.

"But you will run a great risk, Mr. Masham," cried Mrs. Bracegirdle.

"Oh! I'll take my chance," he replied, laughingly. "Better I should receive a slight wound than the stage be deprived of one of its brightest ornaments."

The young equerry's gallantry was much applauded, and Mrs. Bracegirdle assenting with some reluctance to the arrangement, a brace of pistols were produced, and all impediments being quickly cleared away, Masham took up a candle, and marched to the further end of the room, where he took up a position, and stretched out his arm. All being now ready, Mrs. Bracegirdle begged

her rival to shoot first. Mrs. Oldfield instantly raised her pistol, levelled, and fired.

The shot was so true that the flame wavered, and a burst of applause followed.

As soon as this had subsided, Mrs. Bracegirdle took her rival's place. But just as she had levelled her pistol, a trembling seized her, and she dropped her arm.

"I cannot do this," she cried. "I should never forgive myself if I hurt that young man, and would rather own myself vanquished than put him in danger."

On this, the applause was louder and more vehement than before, and at its close Mrs. Bracegirdle said, "To show that I am not without some skill, I will make an attempt, which can endanger no one. There is a small white spot on the upper panel of

yon door, not larger than a shilling. Be that my mark."

And as she spoke, she again raised the pistol quickly, and drew the trigger. The wood was perforated in the precise spot indicated by the fair shooter, but there was a general expression of consternation and surprise, as the door opened, and Harley walked into the room.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PARTY IS INCREASED BY THE UNEXPECTED ARRIVAL OF MRS. HYDE AND HER DAUGHTER—THE CAUSE OF THEIR VISIT EXPLAINED.

"AN inch lower," cried the secretary, taking off his hat, which was pierced quite through with a small round hole, "and that bullet would have lodged in my brain. Another time, pretty Mrs. Bracegirdle must choose a safer place for pistol-practice, or she may chance to do a mischief."

The fair actress eagerly tendered her apo-

logies to Harley, while the others congratulated him upon his narrow escape; and the cause of the shot having been explained, he laughed heartily.

"The victory must be adjudged to you, my dear Mrs. Bracegirdle," he said to her; "for though Mrs. Oldfield has displayed equal skill, you have shewn the most feeling."

"It is very generous in you to say so, at all events, Mr. Harley," observed Mrs. Oldfield pettishly.

"Expert as you are ladies," said Saint-John, "I hope that henceforth you will abandon pistols, and confine yourselves to those scarcely less dangerous weapons, your eyes."

"Glances may do very well for your sex, but for our own, powder and ball are required," rejoined Mrs. Bracegirdle.

"Well, the quarrel is honourably adjusted," said Saint-John. "So kiss and be friends."

Thus urged, the ladies complied. But it was easy to see from the toss of the head on one side, and the shrug of the shoulder on the other, that the truce was a hollow one.

The company then resumed their seats at table, and Harley placed himself by the host, who, while he circulated the glass as rapidly as before, and promoted the conversation as much as was requisite, contrived to hold a whispered discourse with him. Harley's brow became clouded at some information he received, and his glance taking the direction of Masham, shewed that what he had heard related to him.

Soon after this, Sunderland and Kneller arose, declaring they had drunk enough;

while Guiscard called for cards, upon which Saint-John rang for the attendants, and the folding-doors being thrown open, disclosed a magnificent saloon, blazing with lustres, and in which stood several card-tables.

Into this room most of the company adjourned, but Steele, Addison, D'Urfey, Prior, and Rowe, who professed to care little for play, remained behind to finish a large bowl of punch which had just made its appearance, and which they pronounced incomparably better than any that had preceded it. Coffee and liqueurs were next handed round, after which, the greater part of the guests sat down to ombre and basset, and Harley, supposing Guiscard engaged, drew Masham aside, and said to him, "I have just heard from Saint-John of the foolish meeting you intend to have with the marquis. It must not take place."

"Pardon me, Mr. Harley," replied Masham, "I see nothing to prevent it."

"*I* will prevent it," returned Harley, "and without the slightest discredit to yourself. On the contrary, you shall come off with flying colours. But you must submit yourself wholly to my guidance."

"I regret that I cannot comply with your request, Mr. Harley," replied Masham.

"Pshaw, sir, I say you must comply," cried the secretary, peremptorily, "unless you would for ever mar your fortunes. You must go with me to Abigail to-morrow."

"*Must* go, Mr. Harley!"

"Ay, *must*, sir, MUST," cried Harley; "you must not merely go, but throw yourself at her feet, and implore her pardon."

"And wherefore, in the name of wonder?" demanded Masham, in extremity of surprise.

"I will tell you," replied the other, smiling; "because—'Sdeath!" he exclaimed, suddenly pausing, as Guiscard stood before them.

Your pardon, Mr. Harley, if I interrupt you," said the marquis, who, guessing what was going forward, determined to thwart the secretary's plan; "but as Mr. Masham has doubted my word, for which he will have to render me an account to-morrow, I wish him to be made aware that you are favourable to my proposed union with your fair cousin, Miss Hill."

"Confound the fellow!" muttered Harley.

"You will not hesitate to give him an assurance that you are anxious to promote it," pursued Guiscard; "and that you have pledged yourself to use your best efforts with the queen for the speedy solemnization of the nuptials."

"Not exactly pledged myself, marquis," said Harley, looking at Masham.

"Surely I cannot have misunderstood you?" rejoined Guiscard, sternly.

"No, no; you have not misunderstood me, marquis," replied Harley; "but——"

"But what, sir?" interrupted Guiscard, impatiently. "If it has escaped your memory, fortunately I have a memorandum to remind you."

"Oh, no, I recollect it all perfectly," said the secretary. "It is just as you say—just as you say."

This he spoke with so significant a look at Masham, that he hoped the latter would comprehend him. The young equerry, however, paid no attention to his glances and gestures, but bowing stiffly, walked away; and Harley, annoyed at the marquis's ill-timed interference, abruptly left

him, and proceeded to one of the card tables.

At this moment, a servant entered the room, and approaching Saint-John, informed him in a low tone that two ladies desired to see him.

"Two ladies at this hour!" exclaimed Saint-John. "What the devil do they want?"

"I don't know, sir," replied the man; "but they appear in great distress, and one of them is young and very pretty."

"Ah!" exclaimed Saint-John, "that promises well. I will see them anon. Take them to the study, and send Mrs. Turnbull to them."

"I think, sir," said the man, "that the young lady's name is Angelica, and that her mother is a country parson's wife."

"What, my pretty Angelica!" cried

Saint-John, transported with delight. This is a rare piece of fortune! Shew them up directly."

As the servant disappeared, Saint-John arose and communicated the intelligence he had just received to Harley and Guiscard, and all three were laughing and speculating upon the cause of the visit, when the door opened, and Mrs. Hyde and her daughter were ushered into the room. Both had handkerchiefs to their eyes, and Angelica looked as if she would sink with embarrassment at finding herself in so gay an assemblage.

"To what am I indebted for the honour of this unexpected visit, ladies?" asked Saint-John.

"Oh! dear sir!" replied Mrs. Hyde, "such a calamity as has happened! My poor, dear husband!"

"What of him?" cried Saint-John, with affected concern.

"He has been—oh!—oh!" sobbed Mrs. Hyde. "Do tell, Angelica, for I cannot."

"I can scarcely bring it out, sir," said the younger lady. "He has been ar-ar-ar—ested."

"Arrested!" echoed Saint-John, in surprise—"for what?"

"For doing nothing—nothing at all," replied Mrs. Hyde. "That's his crime."

"And a very terrible crime it is," said Saint-John, smiling. "But surely something must be laid to his charge?"

"They say it's a plot," replied Angelica —"some treasonable correspondence with French ministers. Oh dear! oh dear!"

"Treasonable correspondence with French ministers!" echoed Saint-John. "Is he a Jacobite?"

"Lord love you, no, sir!—no more than yourself," replied Mrs. Hyde; "but it's all owing to Mr. Greg. Mr. Harley knows who I mean, for he's one of his clerks."

"Greg! what of him?" cried Harley, uneasily.

"Why, he has been arrested by a queen's messenger," replied Angelica, "and conveyed away to be kept in safe custody till he's examined by the privy-council to-morrow. All his papers have been seized."

Harley and Saint-John exchanged glances of ill-disguised anxiety; and Guiscard, stepping forward, said, with a look of consternation,

"What is this I hear?—Greg arrested?"

"Yes, sir," replied Angelica; "and I heard the messenger say, that the papers he seized would implicate some great persons. Your name was mentioned."

"Mine!" exclaimed the marquis; "mine! Impossible! I know nothing of the fellow, —that is, very little."

"This is an untoward occurrence, Harley," said Saint-John, in a low tone.

"Very untoward," replied the other; "for though I have nothing to fear, yet, as the villain was my clerk, it will give a handle to our enemies, which they will not fail to use."

"It is cursedly unlucky, indeed," cried Saint-John. "Well, my pretty Angelica," he added, "you may make yourself perfectly easy about your father — no harm shall befal him. I will answer for that. But how did all this happen?"

"Why you see, sir," she replied, "a serjeant, a great tall man, with a patch upon his nose, and as ugly as sin, came with Mr. Proddy, the queen's coachman, to see Mr.

Greg this evening, and was invited by him to stay supper, to which he readily agreed. Well, in the course of the evening, Mr. Greg asked the serjeant a great many questions about the Duke of Marlborough, and Mr. Proddy a great many questions about the queen, and plied them both with brandy, which soon got into their heads, and made them talk nonsense about the Revolution, and so forth. My father paid no attention to what they said, but smoked his pipe quietly by the fire, and soon fell into a doze. By and by, they spoke in whispers, and I couldn't, of course, hear what passed, but I caught the words James the Third—court of Saint Germains—and Monsieur Chamillard—which made me suspect they were talking treason."

"And you were right in the suspicion," observed Saint-John.

"What a fool Greg must be to act so unguardedly!" muttered Guiscard.

"I rather think from what followed, that the serjeant and coachman were spies," pursued Angelica; "for after talking thus for some time, they got up, and staggered off; but though the serjeant pretended to be very tipsy, I saw him look round stealthily. About half-an-hour afterwards, and just as we were going to bed, a knock was heard at the door, and Mr. Greg, who turned very pale, hesitated to open it; but as the summons was repeated, he obeyed, and a queen's messenger, as he announced himself, together with a couple of officers, rushed in, seized him, and secured his papers, as I told you before."

"Did the messenger say who sent him?" asked Harley.

"Yes; the Duke of Marlborough," she

replied; "and he declared that the duke possessed certain proofs of Mr. Greg's guilt."

Again Harley and Saint-John exchanged looks of intelligence, whilst Guiscard's countenance became darker and more troubled than ever.

"But on what plea was your father arrested?" asked Saint-John.

"Indeed, sir, I don't know," answered Angelica; "but as the officers took him, he bade us not be alarmed, for he had nothing to fear, as the queen hadn't a more loyal subject than he was, and his innocence would presently appear."

"And so it will," cried Mrs. Hyde. "He's as innocent as the babe unborn. I can answer for that."

"It seems a most unjustifiable proceed-

ing," said Saint-John, "and shall be inquired into strictly. But what brought you here, child?"

"We've done very wrong, I fear," replied Angelica, blushing, and in great confusion, "but we were quite at our wits' ends, and having no friends in London, and thinking you a pure, good-natured gentleman, we came here in the hope that you would befriend us."

"Well, I won't disappoint you," rejoined Saint-John. "And now pray take some refreshment, while I order a room to be prepared for you. I'll undertake to procure your father's liberation in the morning."

With this, he conducted them to another room, where Mrs. Turnbull soon appeared, to attend upon them, and on his return

entered into a close and anxious conference with Harley. Guiscard sat down to basset, but played so distractedly that he lost a considerable sum, and at last rose and took his departure.

About the same time, the ladies' chairs arrived, and Mrs. Bracegirdle was escorted home by Congreve, and Mrs. Oldfield by Maynwaring. Steele and Wycherley walked after Mrs. Manley's chair, and being rather excited by what they had taken, assaulted the watch, and got lodged in Saint James's round-house. Mrs. Centlivre was attended by Prior, who called her Chloe all the way, and vowed he would write a prologue to her next play.

Having finished his conference with Saint-John, Harley looked round for Masham, but could not see him, and on inquiry

found he had been gone long since. Addison, Garth, and the rest, sat late, and drank another bowl of punch, and another after that, and it was nearly four o'clock when Saint-John found himself alone.

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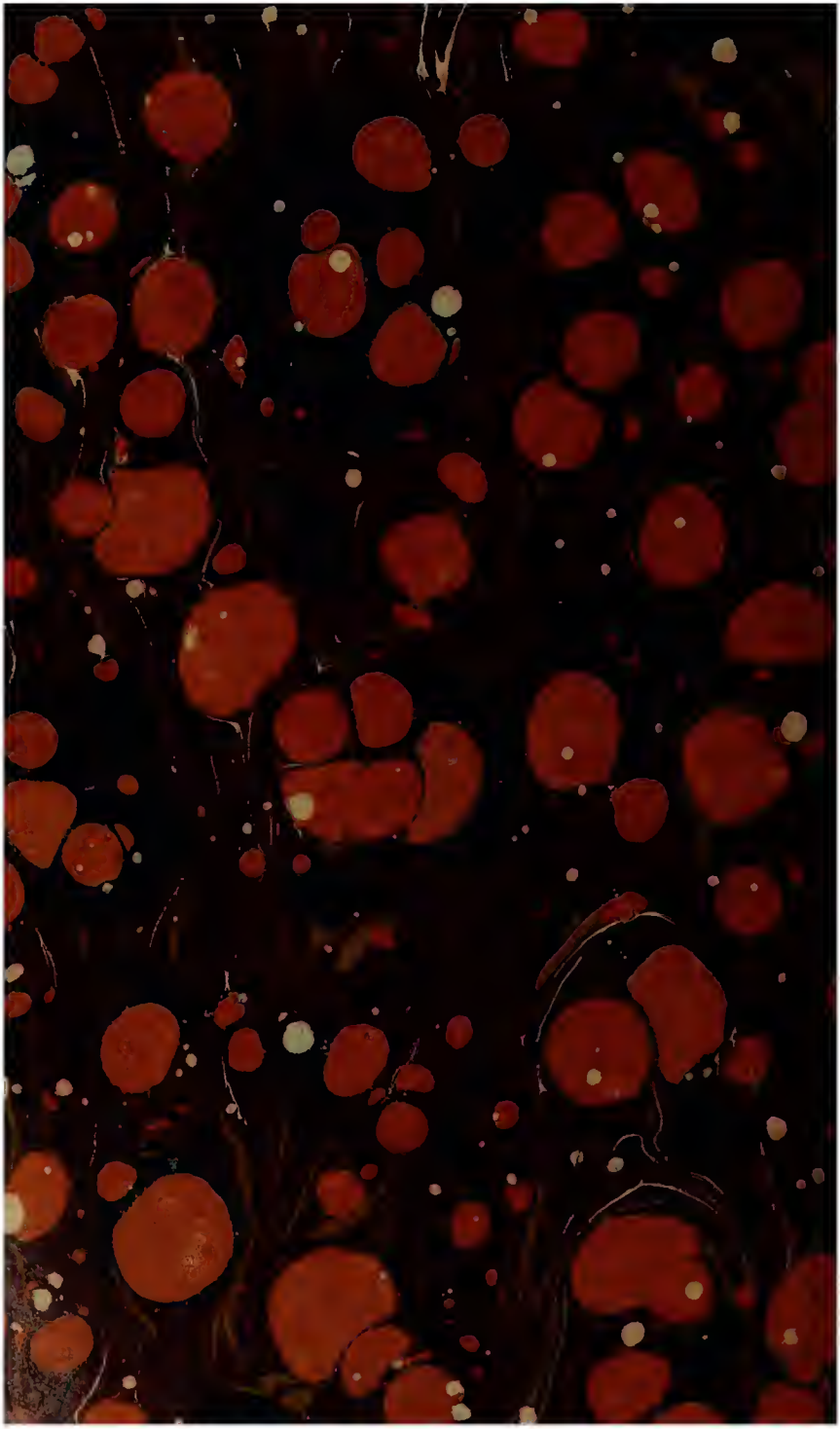
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